



Block

1

WRITING ABOUT WOMEN

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COURSE 2 FEATURE WRITING (ELECTIVE)

Course 2 will introduce you to certain significant aspects of feature writing which are most common to magazines and Sunday Supplements of newspapers. We have identified four such areas—writing about women, book-reviewing, travel writing and interviewing.

The first Block attempts to advocate a balanced view of life and reality, both from the point of view of men and of women. This is because most writing is slanted in favour of masculine thinking.

Block 2 brings into focus certain basic requirements in every reviewer—his integrity, and his acquaintance with allied material on the subject, so that he may be able to arrive at a poised, impartial evaluation of the book under review.

Block 3 will discuss a new category of writing which is becoming increasingly popular with magazines and newspapers—travel writing. Herein we have stressed the importance of collecting adequate background material, identifying a suitable subject, and making a judicious use of such illustrations as photographs and sketches.

Lastly, in Block 4, we will discuss an important form of feature writing—interviews with celebrities representing different walks of life. You will learn that you cannot succeed as an interviewer unless you have worked out a questionnaire, and have familiarised yourself with the use of such equipment as camera, tape recorder, etc.

Finally, an interview script must be judiciously edited to lend it a cohesive structure.

You will find a number of activities interspersed at various points in the Units which will stimulate you to **think, write and do**. Besides this, aids to answers have been suggested, wherever necessary.

Good luck!

BLOCK 1 WRITING ABOUT WOMEN

Block 1 narrows down the field of 'Writing on Women' to certain basic concerns, which a writer must attend to, if he wishes to write successfully.

In Unit 1 we will tell you how to identify topics while writing about women. Since they are receiving so much media attention today, this is not an easy task.

In Units 2 and 3, we will discuss and illustrate possible ways of giving breadth and depth to your presentation through investigative study.

Unit 4 deals with a difficult aspect of writing on women—drawing conclusions.

The writer's commitment to his subject and to his reader becomes visible in the concluding part of his article. Is he objective? Is he fair? Has he given sufficient evidence to support his argument? These are some of the questions we will try to answer in this Unit.

UNIT 1 IDENTIFYING SIGNIFICANT TOPICS

Structure

- 1.0 Aims and Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 How women have been treated in writing so far
 - 1.2.1 Women treated as non-persons
 - 1.2.2 Patronising attitude
- 1.3 How to change existing attitudes
 - 1.3.1 Treat women with respect
 - 1.3.2 Be responsible, not just clever
 - 1.3.3 Avoid frivolity
- 1.4 Some suggestions about writing on women
 - 1.4.1 Need to research well
 - 1.4.2 A lively and simple style
 - 1.4.3 Place for humour
 - 1.4.4 Avoid gender bias in the use of language
- 1.5 Summing up
- 1.6 Activities: aids to answers
- 1.7 Glossary

1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Unit aims at acquainting you with the nature and quality of feature writing on women in newspapers and journals. Much of the writing on women reflects the age-old prejudices and preconceived notions about them. This Unit underlines the need for writers to change their basic attitudes to women and to treat them on an equal footing with men. Only then will their feature articles on women's concerns be considered as serious journalism.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- explain why indifferent and irresponsible attitudes to women need to be discarded;
- defend the position that women should be approached with humility and imagination if one wants to treat them as equals;
- visualise women's problems from many points of view in order to counteract the traditional bias in writing on women;
- research well on such topics;
- avoid all unsupported accounts and statements, gossip, speculation, cheap sensationalism, etc.
- use appropriate language and style, i.e. avoid gender bias in language; suffering and violence should not be treated lightly or satirically; and
- write in a lively and readable style.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Until about ten or fifteen years ago, it was quite difficult to find material on women in Indian newspapers and magazines. Today, things are somewhat different. A number of newspapers carry regular features and news-items on women; more and more women's magazines are being published.

To my mind, there are a few distinct kinds of writing on women that we find today:

- there are people who write on women because the subject is now a fashionable one, and as soon as another such subject presents itself they will switch to writing on that;
- there are others who write simply to ridicule or belittle women; and then,
- there are those who choose to write on women because they believe it is important to do so, in order to set right the neglect women have suffered at the hands of the media, as well as to project something that is closer to the reality of women's lives.

In this opening Unit on women, we will assess critically the first two kinds and see how the third kind of writing may be cultivated and promoted.

1.2 HOW WOMEN HAVE BEEN TREATED IN WRITING SO FAR

Before proceeding to look at these different kinds of writing, let us examine how journalistic and feature writers, in their writings, have treated the subject of women so far. This is important for us to know before we can discuss the future trends in writing on women.

In most feature articles on women, we read about pretty women, always well-dressed, who seem to have all the time in the world on their hands and who, miraculously, never sweat. Or, there are other common types: good mothers, good wives, good daughters. And if women are not either of these, then very often they are just not there at all.

A recent report on women's work by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) points out:

Of all the hours worked throughout the world, women contribute **2/3rds**. . . Women in rural areas grow **at least 50 per cent** of the world's food. They work in **all aspects** of cultivation, including planting, thinning, weeding, applying fertiliser and harvesting. . . In some regions they also market what they grow. Many of them provide the main or only support for the family.

This statement is based on serious research done by the FAO. It establishes quite clearly that women work extremely hard and are central to the society and to life. Yet, when we look for women in the media, do we ever see this kind of portrayal?

1.2.1 Women treated as non-persons

The following example illustrates the point I am trying to make. Some years ago a national daily newspaper began a unique experiment in journalism by 'adopting' a village and carrying regular reports on the development work that was going on there.

These reports, however, said little or nothing about women, although they did mention men, sheep, cattle, chickens, hens, pigs, etc. A woman journalist became curious about this and decided to visit the village to see if there actually were any women there.

Not surprisingly, she found women at work all over: fetching water, carrying fuel and fodder, working in the fields. She wondered how the male journalists, who wrote those reports, had missed these women. When she questioned them on this and asked why women were so conspicuous by their absence from the report, some of the men pointed out that they could not write about them because they were not able to talk to them. How then, asked the woman journalist, had they found it possible to write about the cows and pigs—were they able to talk to them? To this, of course, the men had no answer. So here, although there were plenty of women around and they were quite clearly making an equal, if not greater, contribution to the village, they had remained invisible somehow. Why? We shall try to answer this as we go on.

One of the prerequisites of good writing, to my mind, is that one should approach the subject with humility. (Writing about something or someone is a two-way relationship: you give as much to your subject as you take from it. Or, look at it this way: if it was not for the subject, you would have nothing to write about.) Many writers approach their subjects with a kind of arrogance: you interview someone and you think you are doing him or her a favour. But, in fact, you are not, for you have as much to learn from others as they have from you.

I always feel that, in order to write sensitively, one has to cherish people as people, not treat them as mere subjects. Also, one has to be open and willing to look at a problem in all its complexity. This kind of sensitivity can only come if you live by the values you are trying to project in your writing. For example, you cannot be a sensitive writer on women if, in your own life, you treat them with disrespect, and treat them as non-entities.

1.3.1 Treat women with respect

This brings us to the next important consideration in such writing: the need to treat your subject with respect. A writer must offer perspectives and have a view-point, but he is still not the final authority on the subject. The greater his sense of equality, the more open and understanding he will be. For instance, writers who are politically aware are often impatient with people who lack political consciousness. Unfortunately, women too sometimes fall into this category. Suppose, for example, you are a feminist and you decide to interview a sixty-five year old woman who has been active in the freedom struggle, but who feels quite impatient with feminism as we know it today. You can either listen to her with respect and try to find out the reasons for her feeling the way she does, or you can be impatient with her for feeling differently from you. It takes little to imagine what any sensible journalist would do in such a situation.

1.3.2 Be responsible, not just clever

The following example illustrates another important aspect of writing on women: the need for the writer to be responsible. I quote from an article entitled 'Struggling for Space' by Sujata Madhok, a well-known woman journalist. I quote her words here:

The cartoon shows a mother-in-law pouring a can of kerosene on a hapless bride. 'It is not kerosene, my dear, it is your flight of fancy,' Ma-in-law says, while hubby follows with matches. Murder, one always thought, was not a subject for humour. But this educative cartoon illustrates a serious article in a news tabloid on in Delhi High Court Judgement in the Sudha Goel burning case (**Blitz**, December 3, 1983). The serious intent of the article is further vitiated by frivolous sub-headings. For instance, a paragraph which concludes that more women will continue to get burnt until they find economic and emotional independence to walk out of destructive marriages, is given the outrageous sub-head 'Burn, baby, burn till independence comes'.

1.3.3 Avoid frivolity

Another article speaks of the rape of a minor girl by two policemen.

Two policemen in rather frivolous terms: 'The Mathura case was, as rapes go, somewhat pedestrian', and goes on to describe it as an 'ambiguous investigation of an alleged assault by two pyjama-clad policemen, of a somewhat precocious and sexually-forward girl'.

Note how the fact of the policemen wearing pyjamas is casually brought in to trivialise the rape, and Mathura's alleged forwardness is put forth as an excuse for laying her open to such assault. When people begin to write they tend to forget that they are taking up quite a heavy responsibility, that they are more or less casting themselves in the role of truthgivers. Rape is no subject for fun.

Often when you question people about where they got certain facts or opinions from, they say, 'but I read it in the papers', or 'I saw it on television'. Thus, whatever appears in the media is seen as (a) objective and (b) fact. Clearly, the media exercises tremendous authority. It is seen as reflecting the truth and existing values. But what we tend to forego is that, because of its seeming authority, the media

plays an equal role in shaping public opinion. So, if newspaper articles, for example, portray women as mere objects and not as human beings, people begin to believe that this is actually so. And if you are taking upon yourself the role of a writer, you are equally taking upon yourself the responsibility to write truthfully, honestly, objectively and critically—with a sense of judgement. The kind of cleverness and smartness we have seen in the examples given above is too easy to fall into, but few people are fooled into thinking that such writing is good.

1.4 SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT WRITING ON WOMEN

At this point you may well ask why any of these criteria should be considered special to writing on women. Should not they apply to all writing? The answer to that, of course, is yes. For the reality is, that only too often, while writing on women, they are forgotten, because most of such writing today is patently irresponsible and indifferent. I think it is important to keep this in mind and therefore stress the importance of the points we have here discussed.

I have been talking about how attitudes and prejudices get transferred into one's writing, particularly on highly charged themes, such as women. I have also highlighted the need for a change. This is not as easy as it seems. Ideas about women are at the very basis of any conservative society and change is seen as threat. It will inevitably be resisted. Therefore, to write about women, against the social bias, will be an act of courage.

Here are some guidelines which can shape your writing to make it convincing and acceptable.

1.4.1 Need to research well

Research is an important requirement of writing on women; it is necessary to make sure of your facts and your points before you put them down on paper, because once they are in print, they tend to become gospel. Thus, for example, in recent years there has been a great deal of writing on bride-burning in newspapers and magazines all over the country. Many of these reports have quoted statistics on how many brides are burnt to death in one city, in one year. Often, the figures vary from 300 to 600 in Delhi alone. Clearly, this is an enormous variation. Yet no one has really asked where these statistics come from in the first place. Irresponsibility again—is it not?

The implications of such lapses go much deeper than we may imagine. For instance, one of the reasons why many developmental policies are so male-oriented is that when development agencies begin to collect statistics, they often find that their researchers have been irresponsible and have simply taken the material from existing sources. Or they have omitted to include women altogether because they are not used to 'seeing' them or 'seeing their work'. And so women continue to be treated as inferior; a woman who makes her mark in any area of public life is considered unique—more than a woman. Her achievements, therefore, are not an incentive to the improvement of women's conditions. Whatever is being done to place women in their proper perspective is haphazard. **Research and statistics** are, therefore, vital for accurate treatment of women's problems.

1.4.2 A lively and simple style

As far as possible, writing on women should be in a lively, easy and readable style. This is because any writing is always more popular if it is easy, and writing on women is usually heavy and dull. People, especially those who feel such writing is taking up too much place in the media, often feel hostile to articles and features on women. If the style is heavy, it gives them something more to complain about. So for these people, as well as for your general reader, it is important that you make your writing readable and simple. Ance Jung's feature article 'Women will sit on chairs'

(The Times of India : Sunday Review, July 12, 1987), which discusses the problem of illiterate women being at the mercy of their husbands, is eminently readable—because it is genuine and positive.

Is she guilty—this small, shrivelled, desolate woman? Tired at 50, she bore her husband five girls and after his death lived a tenuous life with just one mission—to see her daughters settled. To settle a girl in these parts as elsewhere means finding for her a house she can call her own and a man who will play protector, even if he is not quite her own but is shared.

To possess a man then seems as important here as possessing a room of one's own. They are factors that are interchangeable. The protector is a man who by merely owning her wraps a 'chador' of izzat around her, her only security blanket in society. By taking her as a wife, even if she is one of several, he puts a price on her nameless head. Ownership, however dubious or diffused, lends a woman respectability. She belongs.

Maimoona Bibi, better known as Manubehn in her new incarnation, does not belong. For she chose to live without a protector. Elder of the two daughters, married and abandoned by the husband of her own sister, she doggedly pursued a career. She became a village health worker, fought to have her only daughter admitted in an English medium school, continued to work on her farm near the river and walked through the village with her medical kit even whilst the men stared and the women gossiped. They did not admire her.

Quite often newspaper reports of assault cases would leave you cold, and if they happen to be long-winded, you would never read them to the end.

1.4.3 The place for humour

Humour enlivens even the most serious themes and adds to readability. There is a great deal to be said for humour. But the kind of humour we have seen in the examples given above in 1.3.2 and 1.3.3 assumes that the writer is a superior being who looks down from some height upon his subject; it is not sympathetic humour. There are different ways of laughing at, and with people, and you need not necessarily humiliate them when you do so. For example, the illustration in 1.2.1 of male attitudes to writing on women has been handled genially, and the humour is not offensive. 'She wondered. . . . To this, of course, the man had no answer.' Whereas the attempt at humour in the newspaper report quoted in 1.3.3 is coarse.

1.4.4 Language: avoid gender bias

Language is particularly important in any feature writing on women. Apart from the fact that the language you use should be simple, you should consciously avoid the gender bias inherent in our use of language. Just as in our earlier example, we saw how women had been left out of the article on village development by their absence, so also, language often shuts out women from even the most ordinary discussion, as though they do not exist at all. Here, the fault lies equally in the language as in our use of it. Why is it, for example, that we always speak of 'man' and 'men' when we mean both men and women? If a newspaper is advertising a particular event, it can do so in two quite different ways: it will tell you that there is 'an exhibition of paintings by women painters', but it will never say there is 'an exhibition of paintings by men painters'. This would seem to imply that painters are men and women-painters are mere curiosities. Similarly, people use the masculine noun and pronoun 'man' or 'he' to represent both men and women. But this can often cause problems—as may be seen from the example below:

This book can be read by people who wonder about strange facts: why men speak and why animals don't, why man feels so sad in the 20th century. . . .

If we were to take this passage at its face-value we would conclude that men speak, but women obviously don't, since the writer hasn't mentioned them. The lapse is even more noticeable because, just before saying this, the writer has referred to women and men as people. It would have cost him nothing to continue in the same vein and to have written 'why people speak and why animals don't'.

Language is not rigid or unchanging. All over the world it has kept pace with new developments in science, technology, medicine, human relationships, and new

words are constantly being coined to accommodate these changes. For example, 300 years ago, we did not have a word for the telephone. Today we do. Similarly, not so long ago, African people, because they were enslaved by the Americans, were known insultingly as 'wogs', 'sambos', 'negroes'. Today, few people would use these words as they quite clearly reflect an inbuilt prejudice on the part of the speaker. For women too, (just as for black people who were originally known as negroes), the reality is changing. They are now fighting harder than ever before to claim their rightful share of a life and a world that they have created equally with men.

Removing the prejudice against them, that is inherent in the use of language as we know it, is a key responsibility for the new writer. This may sound difficult, but in actual practice it is not so. What it implies is that one should be aware that language can be discriminatory, and one should look out for ways to remove this bias.

Let us look at a few examples:

If a man can drive 500 miles in 10 hours, he will be able to reach from destination A to destination B...

can easily be changed to read:

If you can drive 500 miles in 10 hours, you will be able to reach from destination A to destination B...

Or

When ancient man developed agriculture...

can read:

When our ancestors developed agriculture...

Or

Men have always hoped to conquer disease...

can read:

Human societies have always hoped to conquer disease...

The argument often posed to counter these kinds of changes is that the word 'man' (or the pronoun 'he') includes both men and women. But that it does not, and cannot do so, is clear from the following examples:

Men have many functions to perform in life, including bearing and breeding children...

Clearly, here the term 'men' cannot include both men and women, as men do not bear children.

Thus, as you can see, you need to be careful about how you use language. Gender bias in language is visible everywhere—in the use of 'men' to include women as if they had no identity of their own, in the use of masculine pronouns, prefixes (manpower), or suffixes (brakeman), etc. The careful writer will have to make sure that such bias is kept out of his writings, otherwise he will simply be reinforcing stereotypes.

Activity 2

Answers should be brief and to the point.

- i) How do you explain patronising attitudes towards women? (25 words)
- ii) Of the measures suggested to bring about a basic change in attitudes, which according to you, is the most important? (25 words)
- iii) What are the characteristics of bad and good writing on women? (25 words)

(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit)

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1.6 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) The first kind of writing has no sense of purpose, the second one is non-serious and derisive of women, and the third one is committed to the study of women's problems.
- ii) The one which deals with women as mere sex objects and showpieces is the least satisfactory. Why?
- iii) The report signifies the constructive contribution of women in different areas of nation-building activity.

Activity 2

- i) The patronising attitude is built upon the assumption that women are an inferior and weaker sex.
- ii) The most important corrective is for men to shed their superiority, and regard women respectfully, as equal partners.
- iii) Bad writing is biased, negative and ill-humoured. Good writing is open-minded, sympathetic, constructive and free from gender bias.

Activity 3

Hints:

- i) (a) Should the exhibition have inserted the word 'women' in their advertisements?
(b) Examine the use of adjectives; is it overdone? If so, what tone does this style give to the article?
- ii) A good article should avoid emotionalism and sensationalism; it should provide evidence by examining all possible points of view, and it should not 'jump' to conclusions.
- iii) For instance, you can choose one that is very readable, and another one which is boring. Or, you can choose one in which the arguments are supported by evidence and another which merely seeks to sensationalise an issue in order to sell.

1.7 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Feature: A special magazine or newspaper article

Feminist: One who supports any movement for the social and political equality of women

Journalistic writing: A type of writing ideally characterised by objectivity, but sometimes written to appeal to current public taste

UNIT 2 INVESTIGATION AND PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Structure

- 2.0 Aims and Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Scope for writing on women
- 2.3 Interviewing rural women : sympathy and sensitivity
- 2.4 Interviewing urban women : the process of social change
- 2.5 Appropriate style : informal, participatory and conversational
- 2.6 The ethics of publishing interviews
- 2.7 Summing up
- 2.8 Activities : aids to answers
- 2.9 Glossary

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to discuss the writer's assessment of the present position and role of rural and urban women in society. We will also suggest an interviewing method appropriate to each interviewer.

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- justify writing about women on the assumption that women share a common experience and common problems;
- establish the core of your writing in the increasing consciousness of their individual identity, their sense of responsibility in a fast changing society, and their determination to fight for their rights;
- select your norms and methodology for interviewing different classes of women;
- establish a rapport with rural women while interviewing them;
- interview urban women focusing on their aspirations, their options and the need for change in their social values;
- write contrasting portraits of women;
- write about women in a factual yet informal, and intimate style; and
- gain an ethical understanding of your professional commitments.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous Unit identified significant topics for writing on women, and the need for change from a discriminatory and patronising attitude, to one of equality. Various ways in which this can be done have also been suggested. It has already been pointed out that there is an increasing demand for informative articles on women's problems. This Unit will carry the discussion further. We will discuss, in greater detail, the ever-widening scope for writing on women, as they are increasingly acquiring a public role and significance. For purposes of this Unit, women's activities will be largely identified against either the rural or the urban background.

Earlier, we have talked about the need for objectivity in feature-writing. This will acquire a significant importance in this context as well. This Unit will also deal with a standardised method of investigation, particularly the personal interview—its norms, methods and values.

Also, passages have been quoted to acquaint you with the personal tone of the interview, and its write-up.

Besides this, the knowledge of a writer and his ability to keep up with the information boom adds further depth and breadth to his article. This aspect will be dealt with in Unit 3.

2.2 SCOPE FOR WRITING ON WOMEN

From the popularity of the "Hers" column that she started in the *Times of India*, a celebrated Indian woman journalist feels tempted to believe that women are now ready to talk and read about themselves. The invisible veils that kept them from expressing themselves, from coming out into the sun, have now begun to fall. A whole new world of journalism awaits a writer who has the openness and sensitivity to document a state of being which for so long had been taken for granted. To quote this writer:

Let me begin on a personal note. I have always resisted the label 'woman writer', and I have often wondered at the notion that women write out of a life experience which is separate and distinct from that of men. When I write, I think of myself as anyone, anywhere, beyond a race, a condition or a country.

One autumn afternoon, a few years back in New York, I was drawn to a column in the home section of the *New York Times*. The writer was a woman. The subject was being alone. The place was the island of Nantucket in the Atlantic, windy and desolate. The sentiments of the writer almost leaped out of the page to touch mine. Two women, in vastly different parts of the world, were sharing the same inner condition, one that defied time, space and geography.

Sparked, I sat down at my typewriter and stared out of the wide open window at the bare and brown trees of Central Park. The stoic winter scene strangely stirred up distant memories. I wrote a piece about being young and alone in the jasmine-filled summers of Hyderabad. It was a spontaneous reaction to a state of feeling evoked by the article I had just read. Much to my happy surprise, this article was very warmly received by the editor-in-charge of the home section. I was asked to write five more, which were to be serialised in the "Hers" column, a forum designed for women.

In this column women spoke out their minds with candour and directness. There were different voices—serious, funny, factual, nostalgic, reportorial, inward-looking. It offered brief but intense insights into whatever each author, in eleven or twelve hundred words, wanted to tell her readers. In the process of writing these five easy pieces I discovered that I did have some experiences as a woman that probably men had not had. Realising this, I suddenly became aware of my deep bond with women everywhere.

Back in India, I planned to write about women, not about myself but about other women I encountered around me or in distant corners of the country. I found myself receptive to their stories. They readily confided in me, and were heartened to see themselves depicted. I wrote about mothers and daughters, about love, marriage and separation, about women, old and alone; and I wrote about exceptional women whose lives can inspire despite the passage of time. In the process of writing about these people, I learnt some basic rules of talking to others so as to get to know them intimately, so as to make them open up to me—a person unknown to them so far, and very different from them in education, upbringing and social class.

2.3 INTERVIEWING RURAL WOMEN : SYMPATHY AND SENSITIVITY

The interviewer here must have a deep sense of sympathy with her subject; only then can one overcome the artificial barriers between rural and urban women, educated and uneducated, traditional and modern. If you approach a village woman with a natural acceptance of her ways, your article about her will have greater spontaneity than the one which draws upon published studies of her community, or is based on a strenuous question-answer session. As a city-bred person, a journalist, a professional, you are in no way 'superior' to your subject, though you may be 'different'. By cultivating another perception of womanhood, you will gain

Portrait of a village woman named Gomti

This is, for instance, how this Indian journalist wrote about Gomti, celebrating the Gangaur festival in the stark deserts of Rajasthan.

Twenty years ago Gomti, the woman with the river's name, would not have entered my consciousness. Today, nothing inhibits me from walking into her courtyard. She greets me as if we are acquainted, offers me a bowl of water. Water is the drink more precious than anything else, even the usual cup of tea, among the dwellers of these desert lands. Gomti walks miles every day to fetch water from a well which she then cools in large rounded jars of red clay. To honour a stranger is a natural part of her tradition. She brings me water, serves me food, and stands fanning away the flies as I eat. She says little, for she lives her thoughts. When she speaks, she reveals her dreams without embarrassment—even the ordinary dreams which, with time, have acquired the drabness of the land.

Large and rather plain-looking, her body exudes womanliness, a quality of giving that comes to one naturally from childhood, associating with one's mother. Intimacy pervades her courtyard; there is a brooding oneness between her and the black-eyed baby, asleep on a ropestrung cot, the white cow tied to a lifeless tree, and the man whose picture hangs high on a white wall. He wears a bulbous turban, has a regal moustache, and looks like a prince. 'My husband' she murmurs and looks away, suddenly shy. This courtyard spells simple security and harmony; and today is Gangaur, the festival that is special to women, she tells me. She dresses herself in her brightest garments and walks over to a neighbour's home. Gathered under an aged banyan tree are a group of women, radiant in red and gold.

Against a wall, smeared ritually with a red powder, sit two small idols of clay. The women have made these and decked them with their own hands. They represent Ishar and Gangaur, the mythic man and wife who through the ages have remained the embodiment of marital love.

With song and prayer and green grass, the women pray for the long life and prosperity of their husbands. Their soft, frail voices soar out of the courtyard, to join other voices from other courtyards, chasing away the stillness of the long desert afternoon.

Some of the women look old, some are girls beginning to turn into women. The meaning behind Gangaur dissolves the barriers of age. The women begin to seem as though they are quivering at the threshold of a new life. It is the life given by an ancient rite, as early as the Bhagawata Purana. Krishna tantalised the women worshippers of Gangaur. He was the dream consort who stole away their garments as they bathed in the river. And each woman came face to face with him in order to reclaim her own: woman to man, soul to God. Gangaur returns every year to the desert when the grass is green and the harvest is ready. To love and be loved symbolise to the traditional Indian woman her security, her happiness and her fulfilment. The rite of Gangaur binds woman to woman in this common wish; it consolidates the bonds between individual and family, family with community and the land, giving each an identity that is part of the larger whole.

Gomti allows me to enter her world. I feel it, I know it. She does not know the world where I come from, the lands that I have travelled, the books I have read, the faces I have met and loved. Yet we recognise each other.

Something unsaid binds us—perhaps the simple fact that we are women.

I see her living close to the earth, bound to a reality which is natural, almost predetermined, a reality that has not changed with time. If my reality flickers with change, its roots nevertheless run deep in common earth, an earth that embraces too this deep desolate earth. I am not a part of her tradition. Her Gods are to me fragile dolls of clay that have turned sacred with the power and weakness of age and time. If not for her, Gangaur would have no immediacy or meaning. It would have remained a local holiday marked red on a calendar.

- a) For Shaku the journey has almost reached its end. Her aspirations too have not grown nor changed with years. She has lived in a room without windows for 23 years. The pictures that she has painted, hang on the walls breaking into the enclosed space. The paintings bear no captions, the women have no names. 'I painted them out of my head,' she says. Yet one knows that these women are no fantasies. They are her past. They have moved through her life without telling her—garbed in saris with the colours of the earth; women with full warm bodies and straight backs, who have worked hard and laughed less. Life for them was lived in circles that were small and familiar, that sheltered and promised all that they enclosed. In one such circle Shaku grew up in a house of discoloured wood on a narrow street in Poona. All the houses on the street looked like hers. The lives of those who lived in them were not very different. Shaku's father was a social worker who talked about Gandhi, though that had little to do with individual freedom. Identities mattered in the context of larger traditions. Like a treasure, each family guarded them. Around each house, big or small, walls stood like bastions. Life for Shaku was centred within these walls; and around the mission school, the next meal, borrowed books, mended clothes. Father was dead when she was six. Mother, a widow at 37, was making a living as a teacher and going to church on Sundays to draw her strength from God and the priest.

'To be physically able to live alone, was my ultimate dream,' says Shaku. When she got a job to teach in a Catholic school in Bombay, she quietly left her mother, her home and her street. That was 1961. Another time. She was 21 and Bombay was all triumph, the big, beautiful, baffling city. The school gave her a room that became her heaven. 'In this I have begun to speak, to paint and to write. My friends come here, even men. Within its walls I have found shelter and liberation. When I return to Poona I become the girl I used to be. I clean the house, go to the market and take my mother to church. I do not smoke or drink in her presence. I do not want to disturb her values. My freedom does not allow me to infringe on hers. When I return to this room I return to myself, to my own rhythms.' Listening to her I wonder if freedom is also not this: the ability to move from one situation to another without ruffling one's own sense of self and that of another.

- b) And then again sitting with Bilkees in a room with bowls of yellow roses, rare books and bronzes I become aware of another kind of harmony that gently prevails in an atmosphere of order, precision and formality. Her window frames the green of wild palms and the blue of a distant sea. To live surrounded by so much beauty must have its own promise of freedom! 'To run barefoot on the beach, to be able to do things on my own were perhaps the only freedoms I wanted as a child,' she says, looking wistfully out of the window. She was a shy young girl in a large house, who was not allowed to cross the street herself. People surrounded her all the time. When she got married and left home, only the walls changed. She has moved house 27 times and now presides over a government house. 'When the choices are fixed, one learns to create balances in whatever space one has,' she says. 'If you fight a situation, you end up being unhappy. If you accept it, then you begin to explore new depths. I was always aware of people around me, was drawn to their needs. That helped me not to dwell on myself. What I wanted, in any case, was something that was conditioned by the life I have lived, for in the world where I grew up people had a natural regard for each other's freedoms.'

Within the parameters of the life that she has inherited Bilkees has found her harmony without straining for it. She radiates a peace and quality of contentment that Shaku has not yet found. And yet, each in her way, has evolved her own definition of freedom and sought it in a manner most natural to her.

To encompass the 'whole' is perhaps a long journey. To lean towards a vision of harmony and yet to sense keenly life's savagery, tedium, agony and loss—this takes strong nerves and an insatiable faith, qualities that continue to be integral to Indian women.

sense of responsibility towards the subject and the reader. In many ways, the author determines the values that the narrative conveys, and this (in a situation like ours, where inherited traditions are being questioned) is a serious responsibility.

The interview should not only be entertaining and informative but accurate. The author must not debase the woman's image of herself, or cater to the passive reader's demand for vicarious thrills. His intention should be to tell the truth, and therefore his write-up should be such that there is no distortion of facts and dialogue. It is a good practice to quote unusual pronouncements fully. For instance, here is how a taxi driver resolves the problems of rape and prostitution, without mincing words. His sincerity comes through, and the interviewer, by quoting him exactly, has introduced an authentic note into her argument.

'If I had my way, I would marry off every girl when she's 12', he sermonises to me. 'You keep a girl after that age in your home and she's sure to be a victim of incest or rape. You journalists don't know anything about village life. The only way to give a girl a respectable life is to marry her off before puberty. Otherwise her hungry parents sell her to relieve their abysmal poverty.'

Controversial statements and technical matters should be given exactly as spoken.

The underlying message should be such that it provokes thought and introspection, not agitation, violence or gossip. Given below is an obviously biased reporting of an interview:

There is a growing awareness that the Deorala incident is not a relapse into barbaric, archaic custom but a contemporary event. Politicians like N.C. Chaturvedi of the AICC, for whom belief in sati is too deep-rooted to be eradicated in 40 years and who sees the solution in educating people about its illegality, ought to take note. Each incident is shaped by detailed knowledge that sati is illegal.

However, a serious interviewer can very well write up a series of interviews on a particular topic so that the purpose becomes clear to the reader, and it starts him thinking.

Women who are least served by extension services have the least flexibility in time use, have the least mobility, the least financial resources, and are ignorant of their inputs and needs. These facts make it imperative to include a fine-tuning in examining the issues in the light of their potential participation. What specific problems do women have in gaining and retaining access to land or use of tree products? What specific time, financial, or other constraints may have to be overcome to free women to participate? What types of assurances can women have to receive benefits they value from projects? In what way do different social structures allow women in participating as individuals or in groups?

In writing about women in the appropriate 'tone', the author plays a part in the social change that is obvious in the environment today. To accept this challenge is the first step in the achievement of your objective.

2.7 SUMMING UP

The following are the main points dealt with in this Unit:

- There is an increasing desire in women to read and know more about themselves, and their roles in the changing conditions of life. Any writer who specialises in women's topics today more than ever before, has a challenging assignment which he must fulfil in all seriousness.
- There is a need to cultivate a capacity for identifying oneself with the rural women within the framework of their traditions, beliefs and values.
- The writer must be sympathetic and sensitive to the aspirations and options of urban women in the context of changing social values.
- The style of writing should be factual, yet informal and intimate.
- The writing should reflect the interviewer's sense of responsibility, and regard for the self-dignity of women.

Activity 3

- i) Write a 100-word sketch about a woman with an unusual profession.
- ii) Read the following extract carefully. Comment on a working woman's life as portrayed in this narrative. (100 words)

The environment at work creates an unwilling disharmony within me. The doorman at the office gate is slouched on his bench. He fails to raise himself and recognise me—so unlike the policemen at my school corner who knew each one who passed him by. Other men loiter around in the courtyard. They are technically my colleagues, men who keep the machines going. I do not know their names nor the quality of their lives. They have a vague sense of who I am. My arrival always creates a ripple. They turn around and stare, blatantly. Few have the courtesy to nod a greeting, a gesture which should naturally come to people when they work together. They do not realise that to stare at a person, more so a woman, is rude. But then they probably do not see me as a woman, a creature whose place is ideally her own home. I represent to them that new species of women who have brazenly crossed the charmed circle drawn by Lakshman to protect Sita. My face tightens. I hear my footsteps as I march in. Like a chameleon I take on the form that the environment demands. I become a 'mem-sahib', a symbol they have begun to recognise and respect. No mutual codes of honour and courtesy exist here. Courtesy amidst them is not a way of life, nor a language naturally used to meet people. No gentle rituals bind us except the professional one mechanically imposed. I recognise these men as victims of a larger malaise, dismal reflections of a culture that has hurriedly turned urban and got confused. For seven years I have spent my sun-filled days being a mem-sahib in this half-town milieu which people say is more democratic. I see it as a blunder in time and space, a milieu torn by mixed values, a lack of deference, where a healthy exchange on basic questions has been set aside and interpersonal relationships ignored. Going to work every morning I have not failed to question that uneasy feeling of discomfort which is buried deep within me.

(Check with aids to answers 2.8)

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2.8 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) The purpose is to ascertain the living conditions and problems of rural women in the context of their traditions, beliefs and values. The method of interviewing them should be informal, intimate and sympathetic.
- ii) According to this writer, the city-bred women are becoming conscious of the changing social values. There are some who believe in action and struggle to improve their lot, while there are others who seek meaning and peace in an attitude of acceptance, not resistance.

Activity 2

- i) Every human being craves for freedom and so far both accounts hold true. The writing is positive and appeals directly to the reader's sentiments.

However, as the first extract enlarges on the sense of dislocation of a girl of a minority community, and the second one discusses the mental adjustments of a lady who presides over a government house, it is obvious that neither passage projects the problems of the common Indian woman—poverty, disease, illiteracy, dowry, maternity and hard back-breaking work.

ii) *Hints:*

- a) You, as the interviewer, must consciously try to remain open and unbiased towards your subject.
- b) Your language must express personal interest in your subject.
- c) You are free to innovate any style of interviewing.

Activity 3*Hints:*

- i) Your sketch would be similar in matter and style to the 'portraits' given in this Unit.

Given below are some unusual professions for women that you can consider:

- a woman coolie at a railway station;
- a woman scooter-rickshaw driver;
- a woman priest in a temple;
- a woman running a hair-dressing saloon for men.

- ii) In her professional life, every woman is very conscious of herself as a woman. She feels that she is treated as an intruder and an inferior by her male colleagues. She adopts the typical attitude of 'mem-sahib', to assert her female identity and to force respect out of her colleagues.

But is not her exclusion from the 'charmed' circle partly of her own making? There is no indication in the passage that she goes out of her way to be cordial. In a tradition-bound society like ours, men are unfamiliar with women, and it is possibly fear that keeps them aloof.

2.9 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Forum: An assembly for the discussion of questions of public interest

Interview: A meeting between a representative of any media or discipline and a person from whom information is sought for publication

Publishing ethics: Rules of conduct which apply to those who conduct interviews or surveys for publication

Serial: A story or composition running through a successive number of periodicals or broadcasts

UNIT 3 FAMILIARITY WITH ALLIED SUBJECT MATTER

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The importance of specialised study
 - 3.2.1 Do not be insular
 - 3.2.2 Drawbacks of extreme specialisation
 - 3.2.3 Useful knowledge is interdisciplinary
- 3.3 Women's studies
- 3.4 Familiarity with allied subject matter
 - 3.4.1 Issues are interrelated
 - 3.4.2 Access to related areas
 - 3.4.3 Make your context wide
- 3.5 Summing up
- 3.6 Activities : aids to answers
- 3.7 Glossary

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- identify and make use of all resource facilities to investigate your topic;
- explain why it is necessary to develop an all-round, objective viewpoint in your writing;
- validate an interdisciplinary investigation of your topic;
- assess the usefulness or otherwise of a specialised study quoted in a feature article;
- reduce the margin of bias in a feature article by placing specialised studies within the broader context of allied areas of knowledge;
- explain to what extent specialised studies of women's problems are useful;
- treat all themes on women with appropriate seriousness; and
- accept the responsibility of moulding public opinion through your writing.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Units 1 and 2, the practical significance of feature articles on women has been repeatedly stressed. Today, no successful feature writer can escape the topic of women in some form or the other. The 'in-thing' in journalism today, besides sport and travel, is writing about women's problems. After the careful selection of a topic, what is needed is a fair method of its investigation, a readable style, and a wide acquaintance with related areas of knowledge. This alone can guarantee the excellence of an article. Unit 3 will take up the last topic—familiarity with allied subject matter—to emphasise that women's problems can no more be written from the 'ivory tower' position.

Familiarity with allied subjects, besides ensuring the objectivity of a feature article, makes it possible for the writer to view women's problems with understanding and sympathy. Thereby, the writer becomes 'engaged' in the activity of social progress, and tries to improve the lot of women by evocative writing.

The writer is warned against a complacent acceptance of traditional approaches—such as theoretical specialised studies—for he will then have made only a small contribution to the pool of opinion that continues to believe in women's inferiority.

Unit 3 anticipates Unit 4 in suggesting that the writer should be thorough in his investigation. He should eliminate all possibilities of coming to wrong conclusions, particularly while interpreting statistical evidence.

3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIALISED STUDY

When you choose a particular area for your writing, you are in fact selecting an area to specialise in. Often, this is not a matter of choice. For example, if you work for a newspaper or magazine, you may be assigned a particular area by your editor; all features on health can be said to be your responsibility or, maybe, all features on women. Specialisation has always been an important part of writing. There are some people who are lucky enough to be able to write on any subject they choose with equal ease and competence. But for most of us, and particularly for journalistic writing, it is often better to specialise in a particular area. This does not mean, of course, that once you have chosen a particular area, you need not bother to write on anything else. But your area of specialisation does become your basic concern, and people begin to identify you with it and look for your work on it.

Those who choose to write on general subjects bring a wider range to their writing, while a specialist achieves a depth that the general writer cannot claim. Both aspects, however, are important. And in both, if you are not aware of what is going on around you, your writing will be the poorer for it.

3.2.1 Do not be insular

In this respect, feature writing is no different from other modes of investigation. While specialisation is good, it is always better to have an idea of the entire field. An example should help to illustrate this. A German film I saw recently spoke of the uses and abuses of napalm—a thick and highly inflammable liquid used in fire bombs. The film showed how a factory in Germany began by using napalm for peaceful purposes, but then found out that it was more profitable to use it to make products, or parts of products, which could be utilised in times of war—or for other non-peaceful purposes. The factory workers, each operating his own particular machine, never knew, nor cared to find out, any more about the end-product of their labour. However, outside the factory, they often took part in demonstrations demanding peace in the world.

It was only when a member of their union discovered, almost by accident, the exact uses to which their labour was being put, that the factory workers realised how dangerous it was to have been preoccupied with only their own particular area of work. They then insisted on a change of policy on the part of the management and, after a long period of negotiation, finally succeeded in reaching a satisfactory settlement.

3.2.2 Drawbacks of extreme specialisation

The same logic can be applied to any kind of writing. You may have a very specialised knowledge of your particular area of work, but unless you can place that knowledge in a wider context, and relate it to what is going on around you, your writing will gradually become more and more insular, and you will have very few readers left. I would like to use another example to illustrate this point.

There was a time, some years ago, when anthropological writings were very specialised in nature. Anthropologists carried out what came to be known as 'village studies', which described the customs, rituals, beliefs, behaviour and dress of particular tribes and ethnic groups. The approach was generally one that examined and explained to the reader what these customs were—how certain tribals married, what rituals they performed when someone died, and so on. But very little was said beyond that—very little about how and why tribal groups had sustained such customs, why it was that modernisation had not touched such areas in the way it had touched others. So, while it was interesting to read about tribal rituals and customs, such writing left a number of questions unanswered.

3.2.3 Useful knowledge is interdisciplinary

Gradually, such writing began to change, and the scope of anthropology was widened to become, what we now call, social anthropology. This is just to say that there was now a recognition that anthropology had to be placed within a social

In fact, there are no such things as merely women's issues. Every issue is a women's issue. Although one speaks of industrial growth, one forgets that although big factories may primarily employ men, much industrial progress also stems from the very successful small industries sector in which much of the work done is by women. Therefore, any writing that treats women lightly is immature and simplistic.

Conversely, serious writing on women has tended to be theoretical and of academic interest only. In such studies women are treated as isolated phenomena, of interest in and for themselves only. Such highly specialised studies are usually not representative of the larger problems women face today. No wonder, this kind of writing does not mould public opinion and action.

3.4 FAMILIARITY WITH ALLIED SUBJECT — MATTER

As important as keeping your mind free of prejudices and preconceived notions is the fact that, while writing on women, or indeed on any subject, it is necessary to be familiar with allied subjects. This will enable you to place your writing in a wider perspective.

The following example will establish the importance of this approach if your writing has to be effective. An article titled 'Women and Child Workers in Safety Match Industry' by S.R. Natarajan (*Social Welfare*, June 1987), discusses this problem from the points of view of economic, social and labour relations. Given below are the sub-headings of the article:

- A Piece-rate systems preferred
- B Reasons for Wage Differences
 - 1 The constitution of labour in the safety matches industry is heterogenous in character;
 - 2 The volume of child labour and women workers—a dominating feature;
 - 3 Semi-Cottage and Semi-Industrial;
 - 4 Lack of Capital and credit worthiness along with market imperfections and uncertainty result in low wage rates;
 - 5 Material-dominated and labour-intensive industry;
 - 6 Lack of Workers Association and ignorance of labour legislation.

The suggestions that follow are bound to be seriously noted.

3.4.1 Issues are interrelated

Similarly, when you write about women, there are various aspects of the subject that you should bear in mind. These may be identified as:

- Women and health
- Women and politics
- Women and media
- Women and work
- Women and the family
- Women as farmers
- Women and the environment, and so on.

This list can, indeed, be endless.

Indeed it is endless because women play a crucial role in every aspect of human life. People tend to say, for example, that dowry is a women's issue. But let's look at the issue more closely. What is the significance of dowry? It has to do with religion and custom. In Hindu families, it used to be customary to give dowry, and many Hindus also claim there is a religious sanction for this custom. Can we say, then, that religion is a women's issue only? Dowry also has to do with economics; it is said (we are not discussing here the truth or otherwise of this claim, we are merely using it as a

and therefore exposing them to other health hazards), equal wages, the question of political participation, safety for women on the streets, women's work on farms, and so on.

An alert writer must keep up with the kinds of developments that are taking place in all areas, particularly those that are likely to affect women. Write to women's groups, send them your articles, attend seminars and discussions, participate in demonstrations, search for stories and, above all, be sympathetic to your subjects. All this will help you to gain the confidence of the people you are writing about, and will show them that you are genuinely interested in their welfare. In turn, they will give you preference over others who do not take so much interest. In other words, show that you are serious and sympathetic, and half the battle will be won.

3.4.3 Make your context wide

Basically, being familiar with related areas is a matter of sound sense and judgement. Your own experience will tell you how much you need to know on other subjects, and once you start getting a feedback on how you have done by placing your work in a wider context, the process of change and adjustment will begin. You are the best judge of that and, of course, eventually your readers are the best judges of what you write.

Read the letters to the editor published in any reputable newspaper or magazine, and you will understand how essential it is for a writer to place his writing in a wide context to achieve integrity. Here are some examples:

EXCUSEZ NOTRE. NOTRE FAUX PAS!

The title of your feature 'International Flavours'—(June 26), was grammatically wrong. It should be 'mon ami' (sans 's' for singular and 'mes amis' for plural). Did you get any comments from the Lavignes?

Sir—Apropos your drama critic's remarks on Oscar Wilde's **Importance of Being Earnest** (October 28-29), he has failed to appreciate the inherent quality of Renee Pagon's role as Lady Brackneel. The central role had to depict Victorian morality, which Miss Pagon [sic] did with much ease. It is time your critic re-read the text of the play before criticising it—Yours etc.

Sir—The heading of Prem Chowdhury's recent two-part report 'Rise of the Kisan' is based on the wrong assumption that the Indian peasantry has never before risen against economic and political exploitation. It is difficult to imagine the fate of the Dandi march or the non-cooperation or Quit India movements without the peasantry's solid backing.

3.5 SUMMING UP

While stressing the growing importance of writings on women, we said in this Unit that

- Specialised studies on women become necessary for an indepth evaluation, but such studies should not be too technical or too narrow to exclude related issues.
- Useful knowledge is interdisciplinary. Any thorough examination of a specific issue should take into account the larger social context. The question of dowry, for instance, is in a sense connected with denial of property rights to women.
- Similarly, some of the problems facing women are violence, rape, marriage, education, employment, working conditions, child care, contraception. And the related subject areas include economics, politics, law, health, family planning and history. It would not be correct, therefore, to isolate one area and probe into it without reference to the allied subjects and their linkages with it.

Activity 3

Let us now look at the following two examples of writing on women and see what they tell us:

- a) Most Indian marriages are caste endogamous. Though marriages occasionally do occur between a man and a woman of different jatis the vast majority of marriages take place within the prescribed caste restrictions and conventions. In the present study, more than 90 per cent of marriages are caste endogamous.

3.6 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Specialisation is necessary and important for the development of knowledge in any field. Such a study gives one the expertise in a specific area. One, however, has to guard against an extreme attitude—one that seeks 'to know more and more about less and less'. Specialisation will be useful and valuable if it is also broad-based and functions in the larger context of actual living conditions.
- ii) *Hints:*
All information that throws light on the Indian woman will help you to make an outline that will be based on fact and evidence. For instance, the early Aryan religious texts have clearly influenced social attitudes towards women in India, no matter what religion or race they belong to. Therefore, such knowledge alone can enable you to have a proper perspective on women in literature.

Activity 2

- i) Any subject pertaining to studies on women cannot be considered in isolation, ignoring other areas which are, in one way or the other, connected with it. The biological, socio-economic, legal and cultural angles provide the necessary background and perspective against which an indepth study of a particular theme can be taken up.
- ii) *Hints:*
You might try thinking about one of the following:
- A neighbour ill-treats his maid-servant and you are a helpless witness.
 - A woman vendor is exploited by her customers, even the police, because she is ignorant and good-looking.
 - An elderly lady passenger in a public vehicle is the butt of teasing and jokes.

Activity 3

Hints:

- i) Analyse in terms of (a) subject matter, (b) style, and (c) authenticity and relevance. Is there enough evidence in the passage that the writer has supported his statements?
- ii)
 - The passage you choose should not exceed 200 words.
 - Choose some feature article published within the last three months, and state its source.
 - The 'separatist' article will be largely descriptive without investigate detail.

3.7 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in the Unit.

Interdisciplinary: Involving more than one area of academic pursuit.

Specialised study: Restricted to a particular line of study, work or the like

UNIT 4 WRITING ABOUT WOMEN: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Conclusions to be based on facts, not prejudices or speculation
- 4.3 Prejudices and preconceptions distort conclusions
- 4.4 Avoid hasty conclusions: the phenomenon of dowry deaths
- 4.5 Open-ended conclusions make the reader think and decide
- 4.6 Summing up
- 4.7 Activities: aids to answers
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Additional readings for Block 1

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to inform you about the modalities of drawing conclusions in any responsible writing on women.

By the end of this Unit you will be able to

- appreciate the importance of writing well, and working out effective 'conclusions' to articles;
- avoid a hasty conclusion as it is not a proper way of ending an article;
- check your conclusion for possible sources of error: prejudices, unsupported statements, speculation, incomplete investigative activity, etc.;
- decide the appropriateness of a conclusion in relation to the style and purpose of your article e.g.
 - descriptive, explanatory and report writing can do without conclusions,
 - investigative writing conclusions are necessary,
 - open-ended conclusions stimulate thinking and introspection;
- reassess and correct the presentation of content of your article from the standpoint of its conclusion; and
- write fair and open conclusions.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This last Unit of Block 1 is appropriately titled 'Writing About Women—Drawing Conclusions'. It suitably draws together the thematic concerns of this entire Block with a major structural principle—drawing conclusions. You will be better prepared to study Block 2 on Book Reviews having understood the requirements of feature writing in Block 1.

In the previous Units, we have talked in detail about how to write on women—what sort of subjects to choose, how to investigate a subject, how to familiarise oneself with other related subjects, and how to make the article readable.

We have said previously that in any feature writing, the writer has a particular responsibility to the subject he/she is writing about. That responsibility implies that a writer should not lend himself to any prejudice and preconception. He should take his subject seriously, and not treat it in a cavalier, irresponsible fashion. Another major responsibility, which is one of the concerns of this Unit, is the need to be objective in drawing conclusions from what one writes. For, as you know, if your writings are published, they will carry the imprint of truth and authority.

However, before going into the details of the need for discrimination in drawing conclusions, let us ask ourselves some key questions. First, is it always necessary to draw conclusions? For example, sometimes your writing may be merely

exploratory or descriptive. In such cases, it is probably better to leave it to the readers to draw their own inferences, so long as you have presented the facts in a clear and objective way. Or, at other times, you may be simply reporting an incident/event/meeting, and there is then no need to draw a conclusion.

However, you may be one of those who are writing not because the subject is fashionable, nor because you will now get a chance to publicly belittle or ridicule women, but because you believe that the subject is very significant. Let us assume that you belong to the last category and you are doing the kind of writing—features, investigative stories, etc.—that will benefit from adequate conclusions drawn from it. How then do you go about it?

4.2 CONCLUSIONS TO BE BASED ON FACTS, NOT PREJUDICES OR SPECULATION

The question then arises: is it possible to present your facts in a clear and objective way? In any kind of writing facts can be used to present and prove diametrically opposite positions. Depending on which side of the fence you are, or whether you just prefer to be in the middle, your writing will be influenced by your attitude to your facts. Recently, a minister from U.P. gave the following statistics in the Legislative Assembly. He was speaking of the number of rape cases that had taken place in India in the last year. Madhya Pradesh had the highest number of cases, followed by Kerala, and so on down the column.

Madhya Pradesh
Kerala
Haryana
Bihar
U.P.

From this he drew the conclusion that crimes against women were on the decrease in U.P. and therefore, women's status was improving. On the face of it he was simply drawing an inference from the available facts, and attempting to prove a point on that basis. However, it is interesting to note here that the facts the minister left out of his analysis were as important as those he relied upon. Here are certain things that did not get mentioned:

- the minister was speaking only of reported cases, and the majority of such cases in the rural areas simply do not get reported, either because people do not know how to go about reporting them, or because they are scared of further harassment by the police;
- that even if his assumption that the number of rape cases in U.P. was the lowest is correct, it still does not follow that, because of this, women's status has improved;
- also, the minister did not mention how these statistics had been collected; and
- his use of statistics was, obviously, motivated by the fact that he wanted to show how his state was better in certain respects.

Here is then, the first rule in drawing conclusions. Be very careful when you use statistics to prove something. You should take all variables into account. The minister simply presented his statistics in the Assembly. But for us, this may not be enough. These statistics should be substantiated and placed in a proper context. Suppose the minister had mentioned that he was speaking mainly of reported cases. The reader would have been then justified in asking what it was that prevented women from reporting cases in U.P. And, if the right answer to this question had been given, a very different picture would have emerged.

Thus, the same information can be used to prove two different positions. What in all likelihood would have happened in this case—and this is what happens in most cases—is that the minister's statement would have been taken at its face value. On another similar occasion, it would have become much easier for the researcher and writer, writing on this issue, to simply take his statement as fact, and perpetuate it. By this simple process the false or incomplete conclusion emerges as the truth.

From this we conclude that every writer has a particular responsibility, especially while drawing conclusions. He should make sure that his inferences are based on fact and not on mere speculation.

4.4 AVOID HASTY CONCLUSIONS: THE PHENOMENON OF DOWRY DEATHS

Another example may help to illustrate the above point better. In recent years there has been a great deal of writing in the press on the question of dowry murders. Almost every other day there is a report of a woman having been killed or having killed herself for dowry. Suddenly, the issue has become very visible. And yet, ten years ago, very few people were aware of this phenomenon, and certainly there was no campaign against it by women's groups.

Today, there is a concerted campaign which is prominent in the media. As a result, some writers have made the assumption, based on the increasing number of reports in the papers, that dowry deaths are on the increase in India. And if we accept this assumption, we will then have to accept the next one, that, in spite of all the noise and campaigns, women's movements have had very little impact on this issue. If such a conclusion was drawn (and many writers have done so) it would certainly seem to me, as a discerning reader, very questionable. Let us look at what lies behind it, and what else the writer could have done before arriving at this conclusion.

Today, there is a strong campaign against dowry, and the subject is very much a public issue. This means that newspapers will be more open to reporting any instances that take place. Besides, people are aware of it as an issue, and they will be more interested in reading about it. It is now possible to infer that many dowry cases that took place ten years ago simply did not get reported. So, although dowry deaths may take place every day, it usually takes the police a long time to complete their investigations. This is because a case can only be brought to court after the police have handed in their report. Once it is in court, the procedure is long and cumbersome, and newspapers lose interest in the proceedings. Consequently, the reports of these incidents in the media are haphazard and inconclusive. The reading public, naturally, comes to the wrong conclusion that movements against dowry are merely publicity campaigns, and they have not helped to alter the situation very significantly.

Similarly, one can conclude wrongly on a dowry issue if it is studied in isolation. Dowry is a part of a whole complex set-up of related facts—a cultural and political system in which we live. Besides, the last few decades have seen tremendous changes in this system, and therefore, in writing about things that are customary, we must take into account the external conditions that impinge on them, if we are to understand them fully.

4.5 OPEN-ENDED CONCLUSIONS MAKE THE READER THINK AND DECIDE

This brings us to another important consideration while drawing conclusions. When the situation you are dealing with is as complex as the one mentioned above, it is better to draw a conclusion that is open-ended, rather than one that sounds definitive. That is to say, you do not necessarily need to provide formulae or prescriptions for the future; you can, instead, simply raise questions, state the problem in a proper context, and even say how difficult it is to draw any one definite conclusion. Then leave it to the reader to decide for himself or herself.

And now we come to another important point: never underestimate your reader. Never draw conclusions that you are not entirely sure of, and do not think that it is necessary to spoonfeed the reader, leaving nothing to his or her imagination. One of the greatest pleasures and advantages of reading, as opposed to seeing things on television or the cinema screen, is that it can equally engage both the reader and the writer. Often the reader is free to interpret the materials as he/she wishes. For you, as a writer, it is important that you leave the reader this kind of space.

Given below is the conclusion of an article titled 'Women and Social Forestry Programmes' (*Kurukshetra*, July 1987, Vol. XXXV, No. 10, pp 21-33).

The writer has made a positive observation in this article. He suggests that women should be included in social forestry programmes if these are to succeed, instead of allowing these projects to die a slow death, as at present. You will notice that in the last sentence of the passage given below sentence the conclusion is sufficiently open for further discussion, inviting the reader to participate in the problem being discussed.

Just as it is important to have evaluation with feedback built into a specific programme design, it is most important to have feedback evaluations to develop and improve the programme designing and implementing capacity. Currently, growing demands for forestry products are putting an alarming strain on the environment and forestry programmes are having an alarming rate of failure. The new approach to include community participation is an attempt to change the top-down approach in social forestry and to enlist the local support to have local residents participate in solving their local problem. The very need to discuss women separately is an indication that they have been consistently overlooked. Women are knowledgeable about forestry products and community needs, and are apt to be the most involved with forestry product use; their inclusion in social forestry programme planning is essential. But the steps to be taken to obtain this participation are not as obvious.

The conclusion of the second excerpt from the article 'What Should a Person be Like???' (*Social Welfare*, January, 1987, Vol. XXXIII, 10, 38-39) talks down to the reader. The writer expresses his opinion as finalities. And this, ironically, in an article the very title of which suggests openness and mystery.

A good person will be free, and frank in his opinions. A bad person manipulates, suffers for hiding his beliefs which are wrong. A good person executes his social responsibilities before ascertaining his rights. Rights ensue automatically if you have done the duties forthright and with rectitude. One should be graceful and gentle, yet with unlimited zest for life. Goals should be loftier ones, benefiting humanity and not merely oneself.

4.6 SUMMING UP

Given below are the main points discussed in this Unit.

- One does not have to draw conclusions, or come out with final answers in every kind of writing on women.
- Conclusions become necessary and useful in responsible writings on women's problems.
- One should rid oneself of prejudices and a-priori judgements to view situations objectively.
- This is possible only if conclusions are based on facts which can be proved and not on mere assumptions or speculations.
- Complex social issues, like dowry deaths, call for an honest and dispassionate analysis. One should resist the temptation of jumping to conclusions of a sensational nature, for the dowry question is a part of the socio-economic and political set-up, and reflects in a way, the grossly materialistic trend of the times. All such issues require in depth analysis.
- It is best to be open-ended in one's conclusions and make the reader think and decide for himself/herself.

Activity 3

Given below are conclusions from some feature articles. You must match each quote with one of the definitions given, and place the appropriate alphabet in the box provided.

- a) conclusions based on facts
- b) conclusions founded on prejudice
- c) a hasty conclusion
- d) an open-ended conclusion
- e) conclusion to a report, or descriptive writing

- i) The success of infant feeding depends on the mother's understanding of the infant's needs and her ability to wean the child.
- ii) With regard to capital, the Government should provide easy and cheap credit facilities so as to enable this industry to meet their working capital requirements
- iii) She concludes, 'Remarriage is not available, nor would it be at all times desirable as a mitigation of the sufferer's lot. So the poor, helpless woman, with the one chance of ending her miseries in the suttee rite taken away from her, remains as in ages past, with none to help her.'
- iv) Thanks to poverty, illiteracy and lack of social contact with the west, people were initially opposed to female education on account of inherited superstitions also
- v) So ends my sojourn, I leave with a renewed respect. If I discovered anything, it was perhaps that there are such things as great leaders, true gurus. And perhaps there is such a thing as true followers as well. I went as a cynic, but I left with a strong sense of hope—for the world, for India, for my own life.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

4.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) It is not necessary to pronounce one's judgement in every kind of writing, particularly in exploratory, descriptive or report-writing. One, however, needs to draw appropriate inferences in feature writing and investigative stories on women's problems.
- ii) The collection of figures/statistics could be a motivated exercise to prove a conclusion already arrived at.
The proper method would be to go into every significant aspect of the question, be honest, objective and analytical, before citing statistics in support of your findings.

Activity 2

Hints :

- i) The editor has merely presented two opposite points of view in this passage without giving his own opinion on the matter. Is there sufficient evidence in this passage for any kind of conclusion to be drawn?
- ii) A good article should avoid emotionalism. It should provide evidence by examining all possibilities, and not jump to hasty conclusions.

Activity 3

Answers

- i)

a

- ii)

a

- iii)

c

- iv)

b

- v)

e

4.8 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Conclusion: Inference drawn from basic facts (or central argument) presented piece of writings

Open-ended conclusion: A conclusion which does not limit the meaning of the body of the composition and allows for wide interpretation.

Prejudice: An opinion, judgement or evaluation, favourable or unfavourable, arrived at without proof or evidence, but based on what seems valid to one's own mind; such an unreasonable attitude can cause damage.

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NOTES

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Block

2

BOOK REVIEWS

UNIT 1

Reviewer's integrity 5

UNIT 2

Acquaintance with other works on the subject 13

UNIT 3

Assessment of a book under review in terms of
subject, style and relevance 21

UNIT 4

Evaluative judgement 27

BLOCK 2 BOOK REVIEWS

This Block introduces you to the art and craft of reviewing books for publication in magazines or newspapers.

In Unit 1 you are told what is the chief quality you should strive to cultivate in yourself. You must achieve integrity and not be swayed by extraneous considerations while reviewing a book.

In Unit 2 you are shown why a reviewer must be acquainted with other works on the same subject. You must be able to assess whether the book is providing a fresh perspective, adding to existing information or is merely a rehash of things already said by others.

In Unit 3 you will learn about assessment of the contents of the book. What is the subject matter, how is it presented and how relevant is it in the present state of knowledge are the three things you must consider.

And finally, in Unit 4 you see how you should make a final evaluation of the book keeping in mind points like the theme, the writer's ideology and aim, all the while referring closely to the text.

UNIT 1 REVIEWER'S INTEGRITY

Structure

- 1.0 Aims and Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Adequate motivation
- 1.3 Integrity in book-reviewing
- 1.4 Undue criticism
- 1.5 Prejudices in book-reviewing
 - 1.5.1 Personal bias
 - 1.5.2 Parochial bias
 - 1.5.3 Sexist bias
- 1.6 The tone of an objective review
- 1.7 Reviewing without reading the book
- 1.8 Bloodthirsty reviewer
- 1.9 Reviewer pretending to be scholarly
- 1.10 Dishonesty does not pay
- 1.11 The review format
- 1.12 Summing up
- 1.13 Activities : aids to answers
- 1.14 Glossary

1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, I will discuss some of the qualities desirable in a book-reviewer. The foremost quality that you, as a book-reviewer, should cultivate is integrity. What impresses the reader most is a reviewer's uncompromising objectivity in literary evaluation. A review that is biased and unduly critical exposes the reviewer's own prejudices. You should, therefore, aim at dispassionate comment, never allowing your personal prejudices to colour your judgements.

If you follow the guidelines given in this Unit you should be able to write a review that

- is not unduly critical, merely for the sake of airing your own erudition;
- is unprejudiced and unbiased;
- objectively and honestly assesses the book, and not its author; and
- reveals a discriminating mind, balanced and just in its assessment.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Book-reviewing is carried by almost every national newspaper and magazine as a significant part of its literary columns. It is also put out by All India Radio as a regular feature in its miscellaneous programmes. Reviewing can be a very rewarding exercise since it not only brings the reviewer the usual honorarium and a review copy of the book to keep, but also the satisfaction of communicating, though indirectly, with the author and his publisher. He may also take pride in the fact that he is a sort of custodian of certain literary norms—technical, cultural and moral. And since the art of book-reviewing doesn't need any elaborate training, one may learn it with just a little perseverance and guidance.

1.2 ADEQUATE MOTIVATION

All that is needed is adequate motivation. If you want to be a reviewer, you should not only be an avid reader of books, but you should also be able to spare enough time to closely study and analyse reviews published in our national newspapers and magazines. But it is only in such internationally renowned review weeklies as *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New York Review of Books*, or *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* that you are likely to

encounter the most outstanding specimens of reviewing. It is, therefore, advisable that you should make an in-depth study of these weeklies with a view to learning the art of making your reviews readable.

The normal length of a book-review is 600-700 words, unless a reviewer has been specially commissioned to do a review article which may run to 1500 words or more. The limit is usually specified by each editor. It should always be kept in mind that space in all prestigious newspapers and magazines is acutely limited. But within the prescribed limit, a reviewer should be able to structure his material as judiciously as possible—a pointed opening statement, a carefully developed argument and a well-rounded conclusion. A review should never be a mere resume of the basic argument—an inane rehash. It should be incisive and evaluatory, written in a language that is lucid and forthright, not longwinded and ambiguous.

1.3 INTEGRITY IN BOOK-REVIEWING

Let's now take up one of the most fundamental elements of book-reviewing—integrity. Integrity in this context may be defined as unmitigated objectivity. A reviewer should never allow any kind of bias to condition his responses. Nor should he feel tempted to trumpet his own erudition at the expense of the author. Just be your honest self and you will be able to turn out a good review.

1.4 UNDUE CRITICISM

You should not be unjustifiably critical, picking holes where there are none. This kind of carping may unnecessarily hurt an author. Besides, such an attitude is both immoral and unwarranted. 'The blow of a whip,' someone has rightly observed, 'raises a welt, but a blow of the tongue crushes bones.' Emerson also decries such an attitude on the part of a reviewer. 'Criticism should not be querulous and wasting,' he remarks, 'all knife and rootpuller but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind.' In other words, an honest reviewer is concerned exclusively with upholding certain values and not being pungent merely for the sake of being pungent. According to a Yiddish proverb—'If you are out to beat a dog, you're sure to find a stick.' Even perfection, says Pascal, is not spared by an irrepressible detractor. In brief, if you do not forsake integrity and poise you will never lapse into irresponsible reviewing.

1.5 PREJUDICES IN BOOK-REVIEWING

One of the banes of book-reviewing, specially in India, is prejudice. In a country as vast as ours, one frequently encounters all kinds of prejudices—personal, parochial and sexist. It is these prejudices, and not so much a communal or linguistic bias, that often vitiate a review. As a reviewer, therefore, you should overcome the temptation to assume any kind of a partisan attitude.

1.5.1 Personal bias

There are, for instance, reviewers to whom certain writers are just anathema; they would tear apart everything published by any of these writers. As Alexander Pope says in his 'Essay on Criticism':

Some judge of authors' names not works, and then
Nor praise nor blame the writers but the men.

This is obviously a form of dishonesty in reviewing which should never be allowed to taint one's judgements.

There is the other side of the picture too—bias in favour of some author for purely personal reasons.

Personal preferences, apart from other kinds of bias, can be observed in many reviews. These are sometimes obliquely woven into the main argument, or are too overt to be ignored.

Read the following excerpt from a review of *Milon 87* in *The Illustrated Weekly* of November 8, 1987, and comment on the nature of the bias in it. Would you say that the review adds to your knowledge of the book and its contents ? (50 words)

As for me, when it comes to Milon, I am easily impressed. Not just by his pen or his paint brush. But by the fact that here is a man who enjoys what he is doing. As a colleague of his, that's what I admire.

(Check your answer with the hints given at the end of this Unit)

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1.5.2 Parochial bias

Of the prejudices that often influence reviewing in India, parochialism is the most conspicuous. This is because most reviewers tend to be partisan. They lean heavily in favour of their own region, language, even caste. Ask a Kannadigan to review a novel by Raja Rao (an undisputably outstanding writer, but still ...) and see how he blows it up into hyperbolic dimensions. Or let a Sindhi reviewer comment on G.V. Desani, and he'd hold out *All About H. Hatterr* as the precursor of all modern Indian fiction in English. Similarly, an Assamese reviewer is likely to eulogise Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya beyond his legitimate due. And so it goes It is, therefore, desirable that a reviewer should rise above all narrow provincial considerations.

Activity 2

Now, read the following excerpt from the review (published in *The Quarterly Review*) of 'Endymion', a poem by John Keats.

- a) Would you consider this an example of parochial bias in the reviewer? (50 words)
- b) Rewrite the same review without personal references. (40 words)

It is not that Mr. Keats . . . the author has not process of language . . . and gleams of genius . . . but (that) he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry . . . the uncouth language.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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1.5.3 Sexist bias

Let's now consider another prejudice—sexism. Sexism, like a chameleon, assumes various tints. Often the photograph of an attractive female author on the jacket works better with her reviewer than all the matter in her book. Or it may be the other way around. A woman reviewer may take an unduly sympathetic attitude towards a female novelist, poet or social commentator. But in a dispassionate review, sex doesn't intrude. The book's intrinsic merit

should be the only criterion. So don't let any other consideration weigh with you as a reviewer.

You should train yourself to be a perceptive, unbiased reviewer so that you may uphold equity and justice in every context. In his book *From Sexism to Equality*, Narendra Nath Kalia defines a sexist as 'a person of either sex who believes (1) that gender is the most important criterion for grading human nature, abilities, character, career potential, and performance; (2) that physical differences between men and women constitute legitimate grounds for creating significant differences in the opportunities presented to them; and (3) that society should continue to nurture gender-based socio-economic inequality'.

This kind of prejudice operates as much on the level of general social behaviour as on the plane of writing, creative or non-creative. Kalia cites the examples of Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and of Mother Teresa. While Portia wins the case in the court because she displays 'masculine' traits, Mother Teresa 'rejects normal female circumstances' to become a remarkable human being.

1.6 THE TONE OF AN OBJECTIVE REVIEW

Yet, even if an unbiased reviewer chooses to expose imbalances—literary, social, moral or religious—he should not renounce poise, restraint or urbanity. So you may point out shortcomings in an author's attitude, but it is advisable that your tone should never be violent. A good, honest review is invariably decorous and sophisticated. As we have said above, unnecessary carping is a symptom of ill-breeding.

Now, read this excerpt from a review (published in *The Hindustan Times*) of *My Father's Land*, a book about Indians settled abroad.

The strength of the book lies in the first two chapters which imaginatively recreate the situation of the first settlers who went as indentured labour, through the personae of the author's grandfather and father. . . . There is an interesting episode where the author's father Bere Singh is described protesting against a British civil servant for publicly humiliating him.

However, from this point the book lapses into the memoirs of a diplomat in the country of his work. The title would lead one to expect a more historical analysis as well as an attempt to present the cross cultural encounters. . . . However, the focus blurs as the author recounts one diplomatic encounter after another

Had the author regulated his material with a little more care and kept his objective more clearly in mind, the book would have served to provide illuminating insights into the life of Indian communities living abroad.

Notice that here the reviewer points out both the strengths and the weaknesses of the book, with suitable examples to reinforce his comments.

Activity 3

Read the following review of *Uninvited Guests: The intimate secrets of television and radio* by Laine Taylor and Bob Mullan—published in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Answer the questions given at the end.

It may be that every culture gets the sociology it deserves; with *Uninvited Guests*, pop culture comes up against pop sociology. The book's uneasy lurchings between detachment and collusion are well conveyed by its stern title and breathy subtitle (*The intimate secrets of television and radio*).

The book is based on 'research' but not research conducted by the authors. Instead, they have commissioned discussions from a firm called The Research Business, discussions among typical television watcher's and led by professional discussion-leaders. They have also drawn on research done, for rather different purposes, by both the Independent Broadcasting Authority (and chipped in with a research grant) and the BBC.

It would be difficult to find ways of analysing such disparate material whether from transcripts or tapes. Taylor and Mullan solve the problems by dropping the analysis. They present the 'research' for its meagre entertainment value, adding an age in brackets to each fictionalised name in the snippets of discussion, for that extra scientific touch. . .

If there is a deeper purpose to the author's jumbled citations of tabloid reviews, serious weeklies and academic volumes, it is actually to homogenise them, to deny a hierarchy of comment by which the book itself might be harshly judged. When Taylor and Mullan quote from their discussion group, they are nothing if not indulgent. They point out that viewers of television can combine apparently total identification with a strong streak of irreverence. This would be a strong argument if they themselves were able to keep levels of fiction and reality apart.

- i) Write a note on the tone of the above review. Is it objective or not? (50 words)
- ii) List three sentences where the reviewer has made a close reference to the book in making his points.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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1.7 REVIEWING WITHOUT READING THE BOOK

There is another kind of dishonesty that sometimes creeps into this business of reviewing. Some years ago, I knew a reviewer whose mentor—Sydney Smith, had said, 'I never read a book before reviewing; it prejudices a man so.' And so my friend kept spinning out his little reviews, week after week, without reading any of the books. My friend would say—why waste time reading a book, especially a voluminous commentary, political or sociological—or a novel of the dimensions of *War and Peace*—when there is so much helpful material about the book on the blurb—on the inner and outer flaps of the jacket?

1.8 BLOODTHIRSTY REVIEWER

Sometimes you may encounter a reviewer who appears determined to be sarcastic and pungent. My friend (referred to in section 1.7) would say :

And remember, never allow yourself to be carried away by a book, however great. What the editors want is something with a bite in it to make it enjoyably readable. Not just a sting in the tail but salt and pepper all the way.

He would then press on to say that:

... humans haven't given up their gladiatorial lust for blood. So to survive yourself, you must kill.

And in order to protect himself from accusation of malice, he'd quote Nietzsche:

Insects sting, not from malice but because they want to live. It's the same with critics—they desire the author's blood, not their pain.

But I'm sure that you wouldn't forsake compassion, objectivity and poise.

1.9 REVIEWER PRETENDING TO BE SCHOLARLY

And this reviewer could be 'scholarly' too. If a book being reviewed was by a renowned

author, he'd just spend a few minutes at some local library, search out the titles of his other publications (with resumés, if possible) and then work all this material into his review. Scholarship, he believed, can be a sort of 'music-filler' (as they call it in broadcasting), which enables one to stretch out one's review to any length. But a good reviewer should not indulge in any such display of fake scholarship. Your review should be based on your own reading of the book itself.

1.10 DISHONESTY DOES NOT PAY

Reviewing a book without reading it is blatant deceitfulness. Of course, it may keep a reviewer going for a short while, but he will certainly get exposed in the end. Honest reviewing demands that the book should be read closely and discriminatingly—that a reviewer should use quotes from the text sparingly, not merely as padding. And the emphasis should be on the book under review, not so much on the author's other writings, unless they throw significant light on his development as a writer.

Your comments as a reviewer should be pointed, sensitive and illuminating, and not provocative merely for the sake of saying something clever. Integrity, once again, is the central credo of all successful book-reviewing.

1.11 THE REVIEW FORMAT

Given below is the normal format of a review's lead:

Marlene Fisher, *The Wisdom of the Heart: a study of the works of Mulk Raj Anand*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 207, Rs. 125.

1.12 SUMMING UP

In brief, this Unit has emphasised the significance of integrity in book-reviewing. You must remember that as a reviewer you

- should be balanced in your criticism—neither too critical, nor too adulatory;
- should read the book closely, not basing your judgement merely on the publisher's blurb;
- should be dispassionate and objective in your evaluation, not letting any personal, parochial or sexist considerations condition your responses.

To sum up, an honest reviewer is a custodian of sound values, literary or moral.

1.13 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Hint

Does the review even talk of whether a book (pen) or a painting (brush) is being reviewed? It certainly tells you that Milon is a nice colleague!

Activity 2

- a) Considering that Cockney is called 'an uncouth language' it does seem as if the 'process of language' and 'gleams of genius' fall prey to parochial bias in the reviewer.

b) *Hint*

Eliminate the uncomplimentary reference to *Cockney* poetry and language. Talk rather of Keats's genius and art.

Activity 3

Hints

- i) Objectivity means not allowing one's judgement to be affected by feelings and opinions. Take the very first sentence of the review—it is not a pompous sounding sentence that

passes off as a truth what may very well be merely an opinion. Now attempt your answer.

- ii) Para 1, sentence 2; para 3, sentence 2; and para 4, sentence 2 for instance.

1.14 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Bias is a feeling or tendency that prevents objective and unprejudiced assessment of anything.

Format refers to the general physical appearance of a book, magazine or newspaper. Here it refers to the book review.

Resumé is a French word meaning a summary or a summing up.

UNIT 2 ACQUAINTANCE WITH OTHER WORKS ON THE SUBJECT

Structure

- 2.0 Aims and Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The reviewer's task
- 2.3 The well-informed reviewer
- 2.4 The Review Editor's task
 - 2.4.1 Screening the books
 - 2.4.2 Considering the preferences of his readers
 - 2.4.3 Re-editing of reviewer's write-up
- 2.5 The reviewer's duty towards his reader
- 2.6 The reviewer assesses the book in relation to other books on the subject
- 2.7 A Check list
- 2.8 Summing up
- 2.9 Activities: aids to answers
- 2.10 Glossary

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit explains what the Review Editor's and the reviewer's responsibilities are since they must work in tandem. The most important qualification, common to both, is that they be well acquainted with other works on the subject. At the end of the Unit, you should be able to list why this is necessary. The Unit lists the responsibilities thus:

- the Review Editor examines dispassionately the value of the book under consideration to see if it deserves to be reviewed at all; and
- edits what his reviewer has written, keeping factors like the editorial policy of the publication and the readership in view.

The reviewer

- judges if anything new has been said in the book;
- should know what has already been said;
- must be well-read and be well acquainted with other works on the subject;
- must compare the book under review with other similar books;
- must tell the reader if the book was necessary, if it filled in gaps in information;
- and finally he must tell the reader how the book compares with other books as regards price, getup and availability.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second Unit of Block 2 dealing with 'Book Reviews'. In the first Unit how important the reviewer's integrity is to reviewing, what integrity means, and how it can be recognised are discussed. Readers depend on the judgement of the reviewers who have, therefore, to address themselves to their task with a sense of responsibility which implies integrity. To be able to discharge the responsibility, a reviewer has to be not only knowledgeable but also widely acquainted with other books written on the subject. The reviewer is expected to bring out the distinctiveness of the book in question in order that the reader may assess whether it is worthwhile to buy it. Thus, the reviewer has a moral responsibility to the reader who spends his money and time on it. The reviewer, indeed, should be as objective as possible in judging the contribution of the book to the literature on the subject. Before a reviewer gets the book, it has to pass through the hands of the Review Editor who will judge whether the book should be reviewed at all.

The author cannot be the best judge of his own book. Writing a book is like giving birth to a baby. No parent can think rationally about his own child: least of all, about why the child should be there at all. This feeling, in a larger context, is essential for the survival and perpetuation of any species. So is the case with authorship. The book is, after all, the author's 'brain child' in an important sense. If every author had asked himself, 'Why should I write a book?' there would have been very few books—perhaps, the best of them would never have been written! Again, since the author cannot be the best judge of his own writing, his opinion, if at all made known to the reader, may not be of much value. So, the reader turns to the book reviewer for guidance.

Emotion, surely, is the starting point of all activities; the question whether an activity is creative or destructive or merely trivial comes much later. That question, indeed, is what brings into being the institution of critics—more specifically, in our context, the institution of book reviewers. They are not expected to suffer from the 'parental emotions' and so are in a better position than the author to view the works objectively, and to inform the reader about the book's content, qualities and contribution to the main body of existing knowledge in the area.

2.2 THE REVIEWER'S TASK

A book, unlike any other form of writing like journalism, news reporting and feature articles, has a sense of permanence attached to it. Therefore, each book must be judged on whether it makes a special contribution to the relevant body of knowledge as existing at that moment in time.

What is new in what a particular author has to say? This aspect has to be the book reviewer's fundamental criterion for assessment. To be able to answer the question, a reviewer's scholarship has to be deep, interdisciplinary and up-to-date.

2.3 THE WELL-INFORMED REVIEWER

That is the reason why, to be frank, most reviews fail to inform us as much as they should. Unfortunately, those who are thoroughly acquainted with the literature in a particular area are scholars who are so busy in their own pursuit of knowledge, that they find little time to review other people's works. The editor of a newspaper or a magazine which carries book reviews faces this problem every day—how to find an ideal or a 'perfect' reviewer for a book? It may sound cynical, but it is indeed a fact that good reviewers are hard to find. That means, unfortunately, that the editor makes do with the best of what he gets. There is, therefore, plenty of scope for well-trained and intelligent reviewers.

2.4 THE REVIEW EDITOR'S TASK

A Review Editor's task is to finally decide whether a particular review is to be published or not. As you know, the print medium suffers from an acute lack of space. A newspaper may have just one page a week for book reviews; on the other hand, a few hundred books come into the market every week. A newspaper cannot, therefore, afford to publish slipshod and shallow reviews. The Review Editor enters the picture before a reviewer does since many more books than can be accommodated in his publication are available to him. He has to screen these books first before giving them to the reviewer.

2.4.1 Screening the books submitted for reviewing

This is how a Review Editor sets about his task:

a) First of all, by a process of elimination, he chooses a handful of books which, in his view, merit reviewing. How does he do this elimination? He keeps track of the type and quality of books which have, till then, appeared in the particular area, and then decides which among the many are important. He makes a selection of books which he feels should be seen by his panel of experts. He is, indeed, the first reviewer of the books that come to him, because he is making both a quantitative and a qualitative assessment—though only as a first step. A

2.5 THE REVIEWER'S DUTY TOWARDS HIS READER

Thus we have seen that apart from a reviewer, under whose name a book is assessed, there is another factor of critical interference which a reviewer has to reckon with. If he is experienced enough, he would keep this in mind. But what are his duties to his reader (via his editor, of course)? Here is a set of questions he should ask (which the author himself seldom can, because of his emotional ties with the book he has written).

He has to judge: Was the book necessary? Does the book say anything new? Should the reader be advised to buy the book at the price? Was it, in the first place, necessary to write this book at all? Aren't the books already available sufficient to meet the reader's emotional, intellectual and leisure-time requirements? Does the author project a new insight or provide information in the changing context of research findings and other events?

Though writing a book could be an intensely personal experience, publishing it makes it a consumer commodity with public accountability—especially in these hard-selling days when blurbs and advertisements proclaim every book as 'the first in its field', 'the latest', etc. The heavy price tags on the product make it the reviewer's responsibility to help the reader decide whether to buy the book or not.

2.6 THE REVIEWER ASSESSES THE BOOK IN RELATION TO OTHER BOOKS ON THE SUBJECT

The best of book reviews 'place' the book with precision in the context of the literature available on the subject. Not uncommon are instances where a reviewer, when in doubt about other books in the field, consults experts in the field before passing his verdict; for the verdict should be just, and based on unquestionable principles or criteria.

He should take note of the previous works by the same author. In the case of creative writing—fiction, short stories, poetry, drama etc.—the reviewer has another task. In the context of the author's previous work, he must judge what development has occurred in his handling of the theme, language and artistic form, and in which direction his art is moving. Even when it is a scholarly work, the reviewer has to take note of the development of the author's ideas, attitudes, and modes of presentation of his material. A reader would certainly expect the reviewer to be well-read in the author's previous work and be able to trace the author's artistic or intellectual development, if any.

Activity 2

Here are extracts from 2 book-reviews in which the criticism goes beyond an appraisal of the book itself. Read each and answer the following questions:

- Does the review give you enough information as regards the trends, the content and the contribution of the book to the main body of knowledge?
- Does the reviewer have any fixed ideas which colour his review and make it biased?

[50 words each for parts (a) and (b)]

- Most of our fiction writers are obsessed with 'social purpose' of their creations. They are goaded by the zeal to reform their society. They are victims of their own conviction that their experiences are so profound and universal that they must not be wasted in silence. Fine are these noble aims. But how many of them keep expanding their areas of experiences? How widely and intensely do they live, and explore the many changing layers of what we refer to obliquely as 'realities', 'life', 'nature', 'culture', and so on? And finally, why use the so-called message as a heavy roller which only flattens out the many creases and undulations that make a short story exciting? Why this imposition?
- The great leeway and licence allowed in writing poetry and fiction (without which, no doubt, these would not flourish as creative forms) are tempting many Indians to impose their 'leisure-time activity' on vulnerable readers tired of 'intellectual' stuff written in constipated style. By manufacturing characters, designing situations and 'coincidences', and by forcing out a moral or a lesson from the mess of words (like

- Finally, does the book fill a gap?
- How does it compare with other books as regards price, getup, availability in bookstores and libraries?

Activity 3

Now read the 3 reviews given below and compare them against this checklist. Has the reviewer touched upon these points?

(50 words each)

ON WAR

- a) The Second World War ended in 1945, but authors, historians, research scholars and readers have never ceased to be fascinated by it. Even after four decades we have numerous war books being published, many of them prestigious projects of the season. The British, Americans, Germans are all, perhaps, enamoured of history, for how else can one explain over two dozen titles on the Falklands War alone. Even the wars in Korea, Congo and Vietnam inspired some of the finest literary works comprising war accounts, weapons used, policies and strategies chalked out and fiction, as did the Russian march into Czechoslovakia and more recently, its presence in Afghanistan. Publishers in Britain went to the extent of launching a full illustrated series on the World War. Published to this day as the Commando series and war comics it is popular with readers of all ages.

Unfortunately, at home the picture is bleak. Since Independence, in a span of 21 years, India has been engaged in four wars (including the 1948 Indo-Pakistan conflict in Kashmir). But, so far, not a single authentic book or document has been published. The few that did appear were forgotten before they could find a place on library shelves.

In the next three to four months as many as 65 war titles will be released. This does not include fiction.

- b) **NATYA NIREEKSHANAM:** By Guru Chandrasekharan, Prathibha Nritha Kala Kendra, Trivandrum, Rs.125: reviewed in *The Hindu*, November 10, 1987.

The book is a compilation of the research work on Bharathanatyam by the author with a fellowship from the Department of Culture of the Government of India. Over the last several years, though the interest in dance has enhanced significantly not only among the connoisseurs but also among the laymen, literature on the subject especially in regional languages like Malayalam has really not been keeping pace with the interest generated. Authentic writings on dance are essential not only for appreciation and understanding but also for the healthy growth of dance like any other art form. The author, who has made major contributions to the cause and revivalism of interest in the field of dance in Kerala through his performances and now in his early seventies after retirement, has lived up to the expectations through this book.

- c) **YESUVIN THOZHARGAL:** By Indira Parthasarathy, Tamizh Puthakalayam, 58 T.P. Koil St. Triplicane, Madras-600005, Rs. 20: reviewed in *The Hindu*, November 10, 1987.

Are there any trail-blazers among contemporary fiction writers who have had a more enriching exposure to a fast-changing social scene than the writers of an earlier generation? How sharp has been their perceptions? Efforts to discern a trend from a reading of the books now under notice may well start with Yesuvin Thozargal (Companions of Jesus) by Dr. R. Parthasarathy (Better known to his readers as Indira Parthasarathy) who has put to excellent use his stay in Poland on a teaching assignment in Warsaw University for writing a novel revolving around Indian and Polish characters.

2.8 SUMMING UP

In this Unit you learnt that a book reviewer has to be widely read if he is to do justice to the book. You also saw that the book must first pass through the hands of the Review Editor

whose duty is to screen the books submitted to him for review and then pass the books on to the reviewer. He enters the picture again to re-edit what the reviewer has written.

The reviewer tells the reader :

- what contribution, if any, the book makes to the relevant body of knowledge;
- what is new in what the particular author has to say, or does the offer a fresh perspective on an old topic?
- whether the book should be bought keeping in view considerations like price, getup and availability.

In the next Unit you will be told the three main things the reviewer looks for in the **content** of the book and in its **presentation**.

2.9 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Reviewing calls for objective assessment which the author of the work like the parent of a child may not be capable of.
- ii) Refer to section 2.3
- iii) As a newspaper or a magazine has only a page a week for book-reviews, the Review Editor must first select only a few books for getting them reviewed from among those received, although a few hundred books come in the market every week. He, therefore, has to keep track of the kind and quality of books published in the particular area in order to choose books for review. Indeed, he has to have a certain amount of scholarship to be able to make his selection which is based on criteria such as his readership preferences. As he has to deal with books on several subjects, he has to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the book sent to him. He has to prescribe a length for each review and set deadlines for getting them written. Further, he has to edit the review and the way he does it suggests his comment on the status of the book. Indeed, he functions as the first reviewer of it.

Activity 2

- a) Go back to sections 2.3—2.6 before formulating your answer.
- b) Does the reviewer make any statements that reveal his personal opinion, not his objective appraisal? Answer this before attempting the question.

Activity 3

Refer to section 2.7

2.10 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Editorial policy: Each magazine, newspaper or publishing house pursues a well-defined editorial policy, depending upon its ideological, social, religious and political preferences etc.

Review Editor: A Review Editor is one who selects books for review in a magazine or a newspaper out of the entire lot he receives from the publishers or authors.

Screening: A term used in any editorial context for the choice of material—rejection or acceptance of books submitted for review

UNIT 3 ASSESSMENT OF A BOOK UNDER REVIEW IN TERMS OF SUBJECT, STYLE AND RELEVANCE

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The reviewer's job: to examine subject, style and relevance
 - 3.2.1 Subject
 - 3.2.2 Style
 - 3.2.3 Relevance
- 3.3 Subject
- 3.4 Style
 - 3.4.1 Components of style : lucidity, directness, attractiveness and logic
 - 3.4.2 Style is related to the occasion and objective of writing
- 3.5 Relevance: a checklist
- 3.6 Summing up
- 3.7 Activities : aids to answers
- 3.8 Glossary

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, I have discussed the book reviewer's role in practical terms. While reviewing a book you will have to consider:

- what the importance of a subject depends on;
- whether the subject itself is important and whether the book is better than other related books on the subject;
- what the subject matter is and how soon it might become dated;
- the various ingredients of style viz. lucidity, directness, attractiveness and logic;
- how relevant the book is in the context of the present state of knowledge on the subject, the nature of the readership and other extra-literary variables.

At the end of this Unit you should have become aware of what qualities are desirable in a book reviewer and be able to do justice to a book if you are reviewing it yourself.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the third Unit of Block 2 on 'Book reviewing'. The first Unit discusses how important it is that the reviewer should have professional integrity of a high order to be able to do justice to his job. The second Unit explains why the reviewer has to be a well-informed person to be able to discharge his responsibility to the reader who turns to him for guidance in choosing the books. This Unit spells out the task or the role of the reviewer in practical terms, which means identifying what he has to pay attention to while assessing a book and how he should set about his task.

To most publishers, books are nothing more than goods on sale—like biscuits, soap or toothpaste. Commercial compulsions are such: what sells most is the best—even if it caters to the dark, negative side of human nature. Too often, authors get carried away by such considerations in choosing topics to write on. Most 'cheap' books which sell fast on railway platforms and at bus stands are written on a 'cash down' basis: publishers buy the copyright for a lumpsum. Quick money, safe transaction—innumerable authors who might have become fine creative writers have ended up in this trap of potboiling mechanics.

Authors and artists are, perhaps, no longer willing to accept penury as part of their creative lot. Instant money, with a kind of instant fame thrown in, are much sought after nowadays. The craving for these benefits is, in recent times, reflected in works of intellectual pretensions also. Such authors do not write 'cheap' stuff; they want social approval too, with

all the attendant benefits. Popular forms of writing like fiction serve up sex and violence between covers, while books marked by academic postures end up being superficial, pompous and irrelevant.

It is against this background that we should understand the reviewer's role. His responsibility to society is slightly more than the author's. He has to take an overall view, make a comparative judgement of a book, and offer a precise recommendation. There are innumerable cases of reviewers making or marring a book's saleability.

3.2 THE REVIEWER'S JOB : TO EXAMINE SUBJECT, STYLE AND RELEVANCE

Let us take a close look at the three main concerns of this responsibility: subject, style and relevance. Since the merits of these go collectively (and not separately) into the reviewer's final judgement, they have to be evaluated individually. The most important of them is the subject.

3.2.1 Subject

Books based on vague, untested theories backed by misleading blurbs and publicity campaigns are presently flooding the market. They all claim to be the 'first', 'exclusive', 'revealing', 'original', and so on. Books following any political event are a good example. Remember the scores of books that appeared after the defeat of Indira Gandhi in the 1977 elections? Barring three or four books, most were based on newspaper and magazine reports and articles. They revealed very little that was new. It was one of those occasions when, by the time critical reviews appeared (the usual time is between two and twelve weeks after a book is published), people had already bought the books (since the subject was sensational) and found them disappointing reading. It was a lesson for editors also—the timing of reviews must be based on the reading public's mood and interest in a particular subject.

3.2.2 Style

Once a book reviewer has gone through a book and found that the subject matter is interesting, of contemporary interest and there is enough 'meat' in the subject to sustain a full-length book he goes yet a step further. He goes into the book itself to look at it from the viewpoint of the use of language, whether the style is clear and attractive and whether there is a logical development from point to point.

3.2.3 Relevance

Have you ever come across a book that is an obviously re-hashed version of a Ph.D. dissertation? Perhaps you bought a book that seemed to have an original title and discovered it was merely an anthology of previously published articles or stories? A book could sometimes have a misleading title or jacket. For example, a book titled **To Bed on Thursday Night** was seized by the Customs authorities and it was later discovered to be the memoirs of an editor whose publication was 'put to bed' or type-set on Thursday nights! Be wary of books published with subsidies or grants as they may be meant merely for limited circulation or library shelves.

As a reviewer, it is your job to point out both the bad and the good qualities of a book. You will not be fulfilling your duty if you merely ignore irrelevant books. Also, if space permits, you may add a line as regards the circumstances in which a book was published.

3.3 SUBJECT

Before a reviewer can offer constructive comments on the subject of a book he must be aware of the existing literature on the topic. He must weigh the qualities of a book against two factors: (a) Where does it stand in relation to other books on the same subject? Is there a sudden spurt of books, for some reason, dealing with similar themes? Or has it something new to say, some new information to impart, some new ideas or new perspectives to offer that may give an entirely new meaning to the subject. Alternatively, (b) Where do the book and its subject stand in the area of ever-expanding scholarship in the field? Is the topic now

completely exhausted or no longer of interest to the reading public? For example, books that speculated on whether there was life on the moon are now completely irrelevant and even boring!

Activity 1

Name the three points that any reviewer must bear in mind while reviewing a book. Briefly describe each point. (one sentence each)

(Check your answer with the hint given at the end of the unit)

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3.4 STYLE

The formation of a view of an author's style of writing is, of course, a matter of personal judgement. Heated discussions on an author's style sometimes take place. The reviewer must not make a statement on the author's style based wholly on personal preferences, or call the style good or bad without explaining what he means by good or bad with reference to the subject. His assessment of a book must be objective. The true test of a good style is whether it is suited to the subject-matter, whether it makes its points forcefully, and whether it conveys to the reader information, feelings or views attractively and meaningfully.

3.4.1 Components of style : lucidity, directness, attractiveness and logic

The reviewer should ask himself the following questions: Is the language simple, lucid and devoid of clichés? Does the style egg you on to read further? Or does it bore you? Is the organisation of facts and ideas proper, and interesting? You may refer back to Block 1 of Course 1 which discusses the concepts concerned.

3.4.2 Style is related to the occasion and objective of writing

Each subject, that is to say the occasion and the objective of the book, has a particular style of writing suited to it.

A book's style must also be judged against this criterion. For instance, a humorous, carefree or irreverent style in writing about something that had caused grief to people (floods, accidents, etc.) could really misfire. Style is not merely beauty and embellishment; it is communication. A review too must have a style; for it adds to the readability of the review and gives it authenticity. A review that is itself written in a bad, boring style has no business to be critical of the book's bad style.

3.5 RELEVANCE: A CHECKLIST

A book reviewer must always keep in mind whether a book or its subject-matter are relevant to the mood of the readers for whom he is reviewing the book. Has the topic been discussed threadbare? Perhaps there is such a glut of similar books in the market that readers are indifferent to new books, no matter how well-written and attractively presented they may be.

You could bear in mind the following checklist to see whether the book will be relevant:

- the age-group of the reader
- the purchasing power of the reader
- newness of subject-matter
- the geographical, political, and social constraints of the readership
- the topicality of the theme.

You must, of course, be wary of the misleading blurbs on the jackets of books. Tell your reader if the book's title is misleading or if the book is a re-hash of an earlier version. If the book speculates on whether a certain event will take place e.g. 'who will win the war or the election', check to see if the event is already decided one way or another. Perhaps the book is on ice-hockey and being sold in a semi-arid region!

Activity 2

Following are two extracts from book reviews on different subjects. Comment on the subject, relevance and style of the books as could be known from the reviews. You can include your views on the reviewer's style and comments. (100 words each)

- i) Bhatnagar's book is labelled 'fiction'. If we look at it purely as fiction in the accepted literary sense, it is just about all right, as good or as bad as most of our other fiction. But what made it sell over 2000 copies, and what made me read it so closely? Perhaps the subject. We have seen a handful of books on Mizoram, documenting its culture and problems. Bhatnagar concentrates on the different shades of the human factor and their natural interaction. He makes you feel that the Mizo is just as generous or as mean and violent as you and I could be. He takes you into the heart of Mizoram.

Zoramthangi is not a 'novel' to be judged by its follies—they are, of course, plenty and at times the language sounds as 'bureaucratic' as it could be! 'The school is located at a distance of three kilometres . . .' is a style we are familiar with. He could have said: 'The school is three kilometres away . ..'. But then, in its totality, the experience of Mizoram is rewarding enough to make us ignore the follies.

And all this has come from Bhatnagar's direct experience. In fact, when he was posted there as Commissioner the 'locals' were surprised that he had straightaway taken his wife and children there—without fear and without 'assessing' to find out if it was safe for his family. Maybe that is why he was 'accepted' by the Mizos and allowed such personal insights into their lives. That he could write with authenticity is not surprising, even though he is a 'bureaucrat'!

- ii) As a rule, I am sceptical about books on those in power and other living personalities. Questionable motives often preside over the facts ignored or embossed on predetermined conclusions. Mercifully, the two pretty girls who have authored this book do not hide their motive—it is genuine admiration for Indira Gandhi all the way. Nothing more, nothing less.

They begin the narrative on the now-familiar pattern. The curtain goes up slowly, teasingly, uncovering the facts. . . . Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins have done it in recent times. Arthur Hailey, Leon Uris, Irving Wallace and Frederick Forsyth have been doing it and, like others of their ilk, will continue doing it. At home we saw its earliest sign in Kuldip Nayyar's *Between the Lines* and his dramatised version was much talked about. But political writing grew fictional wings to full profit only in the early months of the Janata Raj. Several nests were feathered at the cost of the 'victorious public' and of course, Mrs. Gandhi.

The language, with too many adjectives and repetitions, is glaringly ornamental. This can be forgiven in a book like this which is a product of overflowing enthusiasm. We can also forgive the two girls for remaining unmarried and carrying the maiden name 'Darbari' for, in the brief encounter I had with them, I was assured of their sincerity in praise!

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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3.6 SUMMING UP

Following are the main points made in the Unit:

- As most of the publishers and authors go in for 'instant money', the market is flooded with 'cheap' books. It is against this background that the role of the reviewer has to be examined.
- The reviewer has a responsibility to society which he has to discharge by judging the work in relation to others and examining its subject, relevance and style.
- As publishers' blurbs can be misleading, the reviewer has to bring out the importance and relevance of the subject.
- The reviewer has to evaluate the worth of the book in question taking into consideration the literature on the subject concerned and the place of the subject in the expanding sphere of knowledge. For this, he has to have a wide range of knowledge and a broad view of life.
- The reviewer should judge a book objectively without allowing his personal prejudices to interfere with his judgement.
- As 'style' may make or mar a book, the reviewer has to pass his judgement on it, setting forth his grounds for it. He should be able to say whether the style is suited to the subject or not and whether it is effective as communication.

3.7 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Hint :

You may like to re-read item 3.2 before attempting your answer.

Activity 2

- Re-read sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 before attempting your answers.
- Be careful to be an unbiased reviewer yourself! Check whether the comments pertain to

the book or the author. Also, are there any phrases that reveal biases on the reviewer's part?

3.8 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Review : a published criticism of a book

Style : the choice or arrangement of words to convey certain ideas or meanings

Subject: what is discussed or described

UNIT 4 EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENT

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 What is evaluative judgement?
- 4.3 Evaluative judgement and different forms of literary writings
 - 4.3.1 Fiction
 - 4.3.2 Poetry
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- 4.4 Characteristics of sound evaluative judgement
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 - 4.4.9 Power of suggestion
 - 4.4.10 Reviewing critical books
- 4.5 Summing up
- 4.6 Activities : aids to answers
- 4.7 Glossary
- 4.8 Additional readings for Block 2

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit discusses what are the various factors that contribute to a final evaluative judgement of a piece of writing. Your review should:

- be objective and balanced;
- reflect close and complete reading of the text;
- take into consideration experimental and innovative changes;
- accept that there may be other possible interpretations;
- take into consideration the distinctive features of the genre it is written in;
- consider the writer's own ideological stance;
- compare it with other related works; and finally,
- assess its artistic merits, relevance and significance in evaluating the work.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding three Units, we dealt with the necessity of the reviewer's integrity for an honest and dispassionate appraisal of the book, his acquaintance with other works on the subject in order to 'place' the book in the context of the literature available in the field, and its critical assessment in terms of its subject, style and relevance. In this concluding Unit, we discuss the nature and importance of evaluative judgement in book reviewing, and elucidate some of its significant features.

4.2 WHAT IS EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENT?

When the reviewer examines the value and significance of the central argument, analyses the nature of its contribution to knowledge in the concerned area, and assesses its merits as well as its limitations, he is making an evaluative judgement. It should be noted, however, that as a reviewer you should not hasten to come out with your judgement on each and every kind of writing, when the nature of the material under review does not call for any such pronouncement. For example, in purely descriptive, factual or report writing, there is little

scope or need for any elaborate critical scrutiny or interpretation. But if you sense any bias in the collection of data, or in the inferences or conclusions drawn, you can question, judiciously, the source and authenticity of information, and go into the merits of the writer's findings.

4.3 EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENT AND DIFFERENT FORMS OF LITERARY WRITINGS

The major genres in literature include fiction, poetry and drama. The reviewer has to keep in mind the distinctive features of the specific form while appraising a book of poems/stories/plays/other works. You have to note, however, that genres are not rigid categories and are by no means fixed. You have to be receptive to the innovations and changes in form brought about by the individual genius of a writer under the impact of changing times and life-styles.

The previous Unit has dealt in some depth with the assessment of a book in terms of subject, style and relevance. We shall, therefore, confine our discussion to certain important aspects of evaluative judgement. But before doing so, let us consider some of the distinctive elements of fiction, poetry and drama.

4.3.1 Fiction

Fiction is the storyteller's natural medium, and it is perhaps the most expansive and the least restricted of the types, allowing the writer great freedom and variety. Its major components are setting, atmosphere, plot, situation and character, but the form of the novel varies with one component predominating over the others, giving each writer different capabilities for literary expression. The new forms in vogue are experimental fiction, science fiction and fiction of fantasy. Short stories, because of their brevity, have a limited compass and concentrate on only one particular factor like atmosphere, mood, situation and character.

4.3.2 Poetry

Poetry is a compressed form of expression in which the particularity of the word and the image to evoke feeling assumes great importance. It achieves concentration and intensity with the economy of rich suggestion, the use of the inevitable word or image, and the intimate fusion of sound and sense.

4.3.3 Drama

Drama is a stage play having powerful audio-visual appeal. Its major components include atmosphere, situation, action, emotion, character and dialogue. This form too has undergone modifications traceable to the innovative genius of the playwright working under the fast changing conditions of life.

Activity 1

Consider the following passages to note the difference between the evaluation of drama and that of poetry, and answer the question given at the end.

- a) In such works as *Inquilab* and *Sonar Bangla* a considerable theatrical impact is made from the experience of contemporary political events. The former deals with the Naxalite Movement, the latter with the Indo-Pakistan war and the emergence of the nation of Bangla Desh. *Sonar Bangla* is described as being possibly 'part theater . . . part movie' and indeed its form is semi-documentary and would be assisted by a multi-media presentation. But Mr. Currimbhoy tells his story via a strong narrative, engaging the attention of his audience through the adventures of particular characters. The play is fast moving but sharp and precise, and manages to range widely through action and location without becoming dramatically loose. In this play, as in *Inquilab* (where many of the same presentational devices are employed) the playwright gives one the impression of being committed to his characters, and to their ideas, but never limited by their particular prejudices and passions. To make plays out of the turmoil of our times without some degree of subjectivity would be difficult, but Mr. Currimbhoy balances involvement and a mature judgement with skill and care. The result is that the plays, in addition to being striking pieces of theatre, are also very informative about the events and the personalities upon which they are based.

- b) By any standard he was an accomplished poet, a master of phrase, urbane and sophisticated even in passion (his theme, of love in old age, is an exacting one of which he never loses control). His spiritual home was the upper regions of cosmopolitan society, and in an anthology of twentieth-century English poetry, he would draw attention for a distinctive individual quality rather than for any mark of alien origin.

In what respects does the method of assessment in passage (a) differ from that in passage (b)? (80 words approximately)

(Check your answer with the hints given at the end of the Unit)

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4.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUND EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENT

Let us now try to identify some of the more desirable qualities in a sound critical appraisal of any creative writing—be it fiction, poetry or drama.

4.4.1 Accept the work on its own terms

It is important to accept the work for what it is and not as the reader/reviewer would like it to be. A responsive reader should have no prepossessions or prejudices while reading a novel or a play. He needs to be unbiased, open and sympathetic to the spirit of a creative work so as to enjoy reading it.

4.4.2 Text is important

You, as a reviewer, should not come to any hasty conclusion or form a ready impression without a close reading of the text. Close reading alone will enable you to discern such features as the organisation and the structuring of the work, the interconnections between the parts and the whole, and examine the technique adopted by the writer to achieve his effects.

4.4.3 The creative impulsion

The gap or void between 'what is' (the real) and 'what ought to be' (the ideal) often kindles the writer's imagination to explore and interpret the factors/forces behind this gap in order to clarify his vision or worldview. The writer uses artistic devices to embody this vision or perception of life.

4.4.4 The dominant motif or image

The reviewer needs to identify the dominant motif in a fictional narrative or play — a character, a recurrent image, a verbal pattern and central image in a poem (as conveyed by metaphor, paradox, irony) — for appraising a work in its totality.

4.4.5 Relevance and significance

The reviewer should not merely give a resume or summary of the work without reference to the things that make it artistic or effective. It should also place the writing in the context of life today to assess its relevance and significance.

4.4.6 Analysis and comparison

The reviewer should, wherever possible or necessary, analyse and compare the book under review with similar works in order to bring out its distinctive quality. He may also refer to the writer's own preceding works to bring out any shift or development in his sensibility or concern.

4.4.7 Balanced judgement

The review should be a balanced evaluation of the excellences as well as the limitations of a work. A review which is made up of unqualified praise or censure becomes too simplistic or pompous or too sweeping in its generalisations to be helpful to the reader. Often, such a review does not use the relevant quotes from the text in support of its argument. The judgement should be well grounded in the text and reveal balance, judiciousness and maturity.

4.4.8 Ideology

The reviewer should desist from applying or imposing his own ideological bias on a given work. However, he is free to comment if the ideology presented in the book outstrips its artistry and becomes too explicit.

4.4.9 Power of suggestion

A sensitive reviewer takes note of what is deliberately left unsaid by the author and understands the subtle and suggestive nature of the composition which makes it open to a variety of readings and interpretations.

4.4.10 Reviewing critical books

While reviewing a critical book or an author, a literary school or movement, or a specific work, the central argument of the book needs to be highlighted and discussed in the context of the available scholarship on the subject.

If the book is a collection of essays on a particular author or subject done by several critics, the reviewer should comment on the editor's purpose in anthologising various viewpoints and stress the unifying principles or perspective of such a collection. But if the book is just a loose compilation of essays lacking an emphasis or a focus, he should say so.

Activity 2

Read the following passages and a) note down your first impression of each. Which did you like better? (b) List the merits and demerits of each book as revealed by the review. c) Do you think the final evaluation was just and balanced? [70 words per section i) and ii)]

- i) **The Canadian Short Fiction Anthology** is destined to reach only a small part of the reading public. Cathy Ford's collection will certainly interest those who keep track of the development of young writers, particularly those from the West Coast (the word 'Canadian' in the title of this book is rather misleading). Many of the authors of the thirty-five stories (thirty of them previously unpublished) in this collection are not yet well-known, and most of them have still to realise their potential. Yet, given the unevenness of their work, the regional grouping of the writers, and the vague and sometimes flippant biographical notes at the back of the book, this anthology is hardly suitable for most classroom situations at any level, thus restricting its circulation in one of the usual markets for collections of this kind.

Although less attractively packaged than **The Canadian Short Fiction Anthology**, the stories (none of them previously published) included in **Getting Here** are of much better quality, which presumably reflects Wiebe's experience as an editor. He offers no preface explaining his reasons for choosing the material: it is left to stand on its own, and it does. None of the stories is less than competent, and Caterina Edward's 'Everlasting Mercy' is very good. The craftsmanship displayed most of the time in **Getting Here** contrasts favourably with the ill-considered experiments and downright carelessness evident in too much of the material collected by Cathy Ford.

- ii) These are stories which relate episodes from Indian life often seen from the perspective of a person who has been outside. But these are not concerned with the usual East-West

As a reviewer then, you must keep these in mind while drawing a conclusion about a book, its worth and its relevance. You will, of course, keep in mind the other three Units, while writing up your review—your own integrity is important; you must read well, widely and with discrimination. You must also evaluate a book in the context of—subject, style and relevance. All these Units, then, taken together, have introduced you to the art of reviewing books.

4.6 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Hints

In (a) the reviewer notes the theme, the form, the media, the devices employed and the presentation of the play as visualised in print by the playwright. In (b) the reviewer notes the theme, the form, the use of language but goes on to generalise about the poet's view of life. The difference is that while the first refers closely to the texts, the second seems more an introduction to the poet than an introduction to his poetry, as no works are referred to.

Activity 2

Hints

To (a) your answer will depend on your personal evaluation:

In (b) you should have taken into consideration at least the following:

- i) objectivity
- ii) the genre
- iii) reference to text itself
- iv) relevance to existing state of knowledge
- v) the final evaluation—is there one?

(c) This will be based on your answers to (a) and (b).

4.7 GLOSSARY

Ideology: the body of doctrine, myth, tradition and symbol that represents the belief and attitudes of an individual, group, class etc.

4.8 ADDITIONAL READINGS FOR BLOCK 2

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Block

3

Travel Writing

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BLOCK 3 TRAVEL WRITING

In this Block we shall discuss some basic facts about travel writing and how to approach it in an informed and methodical way.

Unit 1 gives you the background of travel writing and its practice today. You are told how travel writing is an old form of literature, and how its character has changed in modern times because of a number of factors. You will also learn about the skills you need as a travel writer and the different kinds of travel writing that you undertake.

Unit 2 tells you how you can locate your subject. You will learn that, because of the growth of the travel industry, specific types of travel writing have come into being, each with its own requirements. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind your readership and its demands when you take up the task of writing travel articles. Some research, before visiting and writing about a place, would be necessary.

In Unit 3 we tell you about the techniques of travel writing. You will learn that, as a travel writer, you would need to be honest, precise, observant and open-minded. By way of preparation you should consult maps, tourist literature, guidebooks, etc., and visit libraries to verify your data. Your style should be a blend of factual and creative writing.

Unit 4 gives you advice on how to use photographs, illustrations and sketches to enliven and enrich your writing. You will learn some technical details about photographs and their judicious use.

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Structure

- 1.0 Aims and Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Travel writing, an old form of literature
- 1.3 Travel writing today
 - 1.3.1 Why travel literature is produced and read
 - 1.3.2 Factors influencing travel writing
 - 1.3.3 Two distinct types of travel writing
- 1.4 Prerequisites for a travel writer
 - 1.4.1 Keep a completely open mind
 - 1.4.2 Read about the place
- 1.5 Specialized travel writing
 - 1.5.1 Writing informative articles
 - 1.5.2 Writing for travel magazines
 - 1.5.3 Writing for the travel trade
- 1.6 Creative travel writing
- 1.7 Summing up
- 1.8 Activities : aids to answers
- 1.9 Glossary

1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

When you finish the Unit you should be able to plan your travel writing successfully. This might mean making some necessary changes in your outlook and approach to men and matters. Remember that in your travel writing you should keep an eye on your prospective readership. You should also decide what kind of travel writing suits you best.

This Unit aims at giving you the background that can help you to understand

- what travel writing is today,
- what is its motivation and what factors influence it.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to

- practice the skills of a travel writer,
- choose your area of travel writing, and
- undertake various kinds of travel writing.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The earlier Blocks of this Course dealt with 'Writing about Women' and 'Book Reviews'. We shall now take up 'Travel Writing', which has recently become an important branch of feature writing. This Unit is designed to give you the background knowledge necessary to write travel articles. We shall speak here about:

- the extensive popularity of travel and tourism today,
- the large demand for travel features in daily papers and magazines,
- how, as a feature writer, you should keep in view the nature of the particular group or type of readers you have decided to write for,
- the use of equipment you need, and
- the qualities and skills you should cultivate as a writer.

We shall also throw light on the different kinds of travel writing that are available to you in our times.

1.2 TRAVEL WRITING, AN OLD FORM OF LITERATURE

Travelling has always been a basic human urge. Men have travelled for various motives—out of curiosity, for adventure, on errands, political and personal, on diplomatic missions, on pilgrimages, for trade and business, in search of food or jobs, and so on. Some travellers, with alert and methodical minds, recorded in writing their observations and experiences and facts of history, as they appeared to them. The world's ancient and medieval travel literature is indeed very rich.

In India we are familiar with the travel books of the Chinese pilgrims, Fa Hien and Huien Sang, and also with those of the medieval French travellers, Tavernier and Bernier. These books are important documents of our religious, political, social, and cultural history. You would also recall other famous names like those of the Italian Marco Polo, and the Arabians Ibn-Batuta and Alberuni.

In modern times interesting travelogues have been written by such literary celebrities as Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, V.S. Naipaul and Ved Mehta.

The early travel books served several purposes: they provided us with reasonably accurate records of particular peoples, places, customs, ceremonies, etc. Often these books provided the only records we have of the lives ordinary people lived at particular times in history. They gave us insights into different cultures. They showed how the same things could often be perceived differently by different people. They showed, too, how travelling and travel writing as its corollary, is a complex exchange between the traveller, the place and its people. Perceptions differed, depending on whether the travel writer kept an open mind or was guided by pre-conceived notions and ideas.

1.3 TRAVEL WRITING TODAY

The tradition of travel writing is still strong today. It is, however, somewhat different in character, as the modes of travel, and the motivations, have altered considerably. For one thing, travel books are no longer the only source we have to tell us about a place. For another, travel has become so inextricably linked with *tourism*, that the nature of travel writing has changed considerably. Since tourism implies the whole business of package tours, travel agents, airlines, hotels and so on, the pattern and emphasis of travel writing has to undergo significant changes.

The stress now is on *information* that can make things easier for the traveller. The personal element, the sense of adventure and of discovery, seem less apparent. However, there are books and articles that still speak of discovery and adventure. Let me mention a few recent ones. A young Indian, Vikram Seth, has written an account, *In Heaven Lake*, of a hitch-hiking trip through Sinkiang and Tibet to Nepal. The well-known writer, Paul Theroux, has also written about his train journey through Asia in a book titled *The Great Railway Bazaar*.

We don't, unfortunately, have much of this kind of writing in India. There are many reasons for this, an important one being that we don't have enough money to be able to afford much travel. In the West, on the other hand, particularly after World War II, the

writing. For many readers travel books represent a kind of escape: they can read about faraway places, about adventure and the joys and mishaps of travelling, all in the safety of their own homes. Thus there is almost a kind of vicarious pleasure in reading these books.

For the writers themselves, travel writing is often a way of somehow preserving a present for themselves and a past for posterity. Some travel writers say that, especially in this age of rapid modernization and change, travel writing is one way of preserving not only the physical landscape of a place, but also its feel, its atmosphere, etc. This is a dimension of the recorded part that does not exist in history books.

Then again, much travel writing gives us a unique view of a place through the eyes and personal perceptions of the writer, so that not only do we learn about the place, but also about the person who gets drawn to such a place. In this sense, travel writing often tells a story: that of the writer, and his/her discovery of a place.

1.3.2 Factors influencing travel writing

There are several factors that influence the travel literature that is being produced in our time. One of them, as pointed out earlier, is tourism. People now travel for short periods, covering long distances and large areas, and they try to see and comprehend as much as they can. This fact makes it necessary for the travel writer to aim more at providing information than at giving personal observations.

Secondly, much travel writing has now begun to appear in magazines or newspapers. So the need is for medium length articles rather than full length books. In our country, newspapers and magazines have only recently begun to carry articles on travel, though hotel and airlines magazines have been doing it for quite some time. Since this is a relatively new field, there is more scope in it than in some other kinds of feature writing.

1.3.3 Two distinct types of travel writing

We can say that there are two distinct kinds of travel writing today: one that speaks of travel as a personal experience, and another that provides information to travellers. Perhaps the difference between these two can most clearly be seen if we look at books that are called *travelogues*—like the two named above—and those that are called *travel guides*, such as Fodor's Guide to different countries. *Articles on travel*, such as those that appear in our newspapers and magazines, fall somewhere between the two, as they combine elements of both.

A good travel article should, first of all, be readable and lively. It should be able to exercise the interest and curiosity of the reader. No one would care for a dull record of facts. The writer, therefore, should choose a style that arouses and sustains the reader's interest. It is obvious that this cannot be done without introducing an element of personal experience, which alone can make any writing authentic and credible. But you should guard against being too subjective. You have to be a genuine creative writer to make your personal experiences carry a universal appeal. Nevertheless, a personal anecdote here and there, can add considerably to the interest of a piece of writing. Additionally, it can offer the reader the feel of a place, and can recreate a period or moment in history as, for example, Graham Greene has done in the passage quoted below from his book, *The Lawless Roads*. Greene is here writing about the Mexico of 1938, the lawlessness, insecurity and violence of the time and of the country. In one of the towns he meets a person, British by blood but born in Mexico, who speaks with a Spanish-American accent.

In 1927 he had been kidnapped by rebels and held for ransom together with a young American from the same mine. He had been expecting something of the sort for days, but the American didn't believe in banditry—it was too like fiction or the films—it wasn't true. He used to try to scare the young man by calling out to him

that the bandits were coming—the first time the American had believed it, but not again. And then the bandits did come. He had a few minutes warning when they rode in and he tried to call the American out of bed. ‘You lay off,’ the young man said, ‘you can’t scare me’—and then the room was full of them. They were looking for money there. They pushed their prisoners against the wall. I thought they were going to shoot. You should have seen that American’s face. I was laughing. There wasn’t anything else to do...

I believed him. He had lost too much in Mexico to mind. One came across others in Mexico like that...

Activity 1

Given below are two passages which show two different kinds of travel writing. (i) Which do you like better and why? (ii) What qualities does each one have? (150 words altogether)

(Check your answers with hints given at the end of the Unit)

Passage 1

The home of lilting desert music and colourfully dressed nomadic tribes, the Thar Desert is exotic country for the adventurous traveller. The perilous sea of undulating sand is too inhospitable even for the hardy desert cactus. Here, in the shadow of sand dunes rising 30 metres up to the sky, people measure time with memories of each passing *akal*, the dreaded visitation of famine.

To change the desert dwellers’ ‘ballad’ of sorrow into a song of joy and promise is the promise of the Indira Gandhi Nahar. It is a dazzling sight. In the vast expanse of barren sand, suddenly there is a man-made river brimming with the possibility of green pasture land and bumper harvests. The shimmering blue waters of the canal flow through acres and acres of dry sand, challenging the supremacy of the desert.

Passage 2

The beginning of the journey was hard and rather unpleasant for us both. For the whole of the first day, from Le Monastier to Le Bouchet, a distance of twenty-five kilometers over steep country roads, baked in hot golden dust, Robert Louis Stevenson had endless and humiliating troubles with his donkey, Modestine. She refused to climb hills she shed her saddle bag at the least provocation, and in villages she swerved into the cool of the beaded shop-doors. He was forced to beat her relentlessly, first with his own walking cane and then with a thorn-switch cut from a hedge by a peasant on the long climb up to Goudet.

At Costaros, the villagers even tried to intervene, taking the side of the French donkey against the Foreign Tyrant: ‘Ah,’ they cried, ‘how tired she is, the poor beast.’

Stevenson lost his temper, ‘Mind your own affairs—unless you would like to help carry my basket?’ He departed, amid laughter from the Sunday loiterers, who had just come out of church and were feeling charitable.

(Travels with a Donkey : R.L. Stevenson)

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1.4 PREREQUISITES FOR A TRAVEL WRITER

Basically, what this means is that the travel writer has to combine many skills, because he/she is speaking of lived experience, while, at the same time, telling a story of travel and adventure, or providing information. Such a writer has to be a bit of a journalist, something of a reporter, something of a researcher, perhaps even something of a novelist. He/she has to be a person who lives both in the present and the past. And as if that is not enough, the travel writer, because this kind of writing is as visual as any kind of creative writing, must be endowed with a visual imagination and a capacity to communicate a picture of a place.

This may seem rather like a tall order. How does one even begin to be all these things? In many ways, it is precisely because travel writing is indeed all of these things that is why it may be as exciting to do a travel book as to write a novel. How then, can one prepare oneself for such writing and is there any background material that can be of help?

1.4.1 Keep a completely open mind

One of the first prerequisites of a travel writer is that he should have a completely open mind. This does not mean, however, that you deliberately keep your mind blank. It only implies that you should go to a place with an open but informed mind—informed yet free of prejudice. Mostly, travel writers choose to go to a particular place, because they have read or heard something about it. It is only rarely that someone gets hold of a map, selects a spot at random, and visits it. So, if you wish to be prepared, talk to people who have been there already. Be alert to record some useful and interesting details, facts and observations. This information you may not find in a book or acquire at a tourist agency counter.

1.4.2 Read about a place

Reading about a place, its history, its geography, its politics, culture and people is as important as talking to people who have visited it. Such reading will save you from an embarrassment in which you arrive at a place without knowing where to go and what to look for. It will help you not only to form an overall idea of the natural and historical landscape of a place but also to locate spots of interest, e.g. medieval bazaar in a historical city, chief monuments and their architectural styles, the racial types to be found among its population and so on.

Reading will, thus, help you counter the bias of subjective reporting. The only danger you should guard against is this: you should not allow your reading to make your mind too stuffed with pre-conceived ideas, because then your experience of a place will be coloured and conditioned by what you have read about it.

1.5.2 Writing for travel magazines

If you are writing for a travel magazine or newspaper in India, it often helps to be able to provide illustrations, photographs, recent as well as old ones. In this case, it helps to do some research in photolabs or contact some professional photographers who may advise you as to where relevant material may be available, and at what cost (you will read more about this in Unit 4)

1.5.3 Writing for the travel trade

Again, if your travel writing is geared to the travel trade, it is important that you keep yourself abreast of all developments within the trade. For instance, there are today more business travellers than ever before, and the kind of information they need is quite different from what is required by other travellers. A simple way of doing this, on a continuing basis, is to travel as much as possible yourself, meet as many people as possible, and keep in touch with trade journals and publications.

These are things you need to do on an ongoing basis. You may ask why methods have not been suggested whereby you can collect background material for any single travel pieces. The answer to that is that all the suggestions given above are as valid for all kinds of travel writing and once you start preparing yourself, you learn things on your own.

1.6 CREATIVE TRAVEL WRITING

Creative travel writing is in a class by itself. It is the kind of writing that, apart from whatever information or knowledge it might give, is interesting per se, as a piece of imaginative prose (which has its own cadence), as a record of lively experience. Creativity cannot be taught, it comes from the writer's own awareness, his or her sensibility and flair for a quick, keen observation, an ability to see things and listen to people. Read the two extracts, both opening paragraphs of travel articles. In each case the writer begins by describing his arrival at his destination. The tone of each is very different—one is prosaic while the other is poetic—the reader immediately visualizes each scene.

Extract 1

Fasten belt, the sign flashed overhead. The two-hour Indian Airlines flight from Calcutta was coming to an end. Below, the land mass suddenly came into view. Nearly every passenger was vying to peer through the windows. The islands looked like large emeralds splashed by crystal blue waters. 'Are you also a tourist', I asked the teenage girl sitting next to me, who was quite enthralled to see the islands. 'No, I belong to the Andamans—Middle Andaman', she replied with justifiable pride. 'Aren't they beautiful', she added.

Extract 2

It rose from a perennially blue sea, or so it seemed to the entranced eyes as we approached Sicily, which was just a hazy outline in the morning sun and the endless blue skies. Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean, is known as the island of the grand volcano and volcanic passions.

Just a dot on a map gives way to something complex, varied and elusive once one sets foot on the sand. Not only are there stunning views at every turn, but myth and legend and Arcadian poetry in the air could, in a flash dissolve into moments of high tension and drama. Quite like the unpredictable Mount Etna...

1.8 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Hints:

Passage 1 combines information with some picturesque description. The style is journalistic and it is both useful and readable.

Passage 2 is more lively. It introduces story interest with sidelights on terrain and attitude and character of the villagers.

Activity 2

- i) The present day travel writer needs the skills of a journalist, reporter, researcher, and creative writer. He should have a lively imagination, keen observation and an open mind. Besides being well informed he should have the capacity to appreciate both the past and the present.
- ii) (a) Early travel books offer us reasonably accurate records of peoples, their customs, habits, ways of living, etc.,
(b) insight, into alien cultures,
(c) knowledge of different attitudes and viewpoints of different people at certain periods of history.
- iii) (a) travel is today often linked with tourism;
(b) people travel for short periods and have varied interests;
(c) information has become more important than impressions;
(d) travel writing today is published in magazines and newspapers, hence articles are of medium length.

Activity 3

Do this in the light of what you have read. Be imaginative, see (regarding ii) if you can strike a balance between a factual and a creative approach. Readability is important.

Hints:

- a) State your reason for visiting and your area of interest in writing about a particular resort, city, etc.
- b) In what format do you wish to present your travel experience i.e. magazine article, journal article, for a newspaper, travel brochure, etc.
- c) Mention the names, professions and interests of at least three people whom you would like to talk to about your proposed holiday.
- d) Give the titles, publishers, date of publication and very brief resumes of books, articles etc. you have read, which besides informing you, have sharpened your interest in the place you intend to visit.
- e) Give some details of equipment, budget, etc.
- f) Plan an outline of your itinerary.

1.9 GLOSSARY

Travelogue: originally illustrated lecture—narrative of expedition; now any written travel account

Profile : aspect, appearance, sketch, short description, especially of a person's life and character, as given in a newspaper or on TV, hence personality profile

UNIT 2 LOCATING AN APPROPRIATE SUBJECT

Structure

- 2.0 Aims and Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The changed nature of travel writing today
- 2.3 Kinds of travel writing
 - 2.3.1 Promotional literature
 - 2.3.2 Informative articles for the tourist
 - 2.3.3 Articles aimed at the business traveller
 - 2.3.4 Travel trade reporting
 - 2.3.5 Articles for the armchair traveller
- 2.4 Discover your particular skill in travel writing
- 2.5 Summing up
- 2.6 Activities: aids to answers
- 2.7 Glossary

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

When you finish reading this Unit, you will understand why travel writing today is predominantly informative, how it caters to the needs of well-defined sections of society, and different types of travellers and publications.

This Unit tells you that:

- all travel writing is conditioned by its prospective readership and by the publications in which it is to appear;
- specific types of travel writing have come into being with the growth of the travel industry.

You should also be able to

- decide on your particular areas of interest keeping in mind your aptitudes and skills;
- sharpen your writing skills by practising the activities that accompany the text;
- suit your style to the content of your article;
- write clearly and honestly so that the presentation is lucid and readable;
- research and catalogue resource materials for personal use.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit you learnt how travel writing as a form of literature has developed in our times, what factors influence and motivate it, what specialized forms of writing are available to you, and what skills and qualities you need to cultivate for becoming a good travel writer.

This Unit gives you, in greater detail, the specific types of travel writing popular today and the particular requirements of each of them so that, after assessing your own predilections and skills, you should be able to choose your area of interest and locate your subject.

2.2 THE CHANGED NATURE OF TRAVEL WRITING TODAY

The travel industry in India is developing and expanding, and with it travel writing is becoming more specifically focused and sophisticated. Travel

writing aims at identifying audiences and at meeting the needs of several distinctly different kinds of travel publications. It is no longer enough to write a descriptive essay on a place you have visited and what you saw there. Editors and readers now demand a great deal more than that.

They want

- concrete words rather than adjectives;
- factual information rather than description;
- details of things to do; and
- knowledgeable explanations of the culture, crafts, cuisine, customs and environment of a particular region.

Being a travel writer means developing a lively interest in peoples and places and a flair for combining a vivid account of what you have seen with a formidable array of useful facts.

2.3 KINDS OF TRAVEL WRITING

Before you even begin to locate an appropriate subject, it is imperative that you know very clearly.

- who your readers are, and
- what sort of publication you are writing for.

These two factors are important. They determine the types of travel literature that is in demand today.

You may note the following types of travel writing:

Promotional literature: Brochures, booklets, pamphlets and other materials which are put out by state and national tourism promotion establishments, with a view to inducing people to visit a particular area.

Informative articles for the tourist: Articles which inform would-be travellers about interesting places and are meant for publication in a general travel magazine, a Sunday newspaper supplement, or the travel section of any one of a number of magazines.

Articles aimed at the business traveller: These are factual articles aimed at conveying travel information to this important and growing segment of the travelling public.

Travel trade reporting: This is meant to carry news for members of the travel trade; these comprise travel agents, tour operators, people from the government tourist offices, airlines, and hotels, etc.

Articles for the armchair traveller are elegantly written accounts of visits to exotic or unusual places to entertain the reader who chooses to do his travelling by proxy.

2.3.1 Promotional literature

The Department of Tourism and the State Tourism Development Corporations publish a variety of brochures and booklets with a view to promoting travel within India. Such publications are clearly designed as forms of advertisement or sales aids.

Your reader, in this case, is the potential tourist.

Your objective is to persuade your reader to visit a particular place by extolling

- its points of interest,
- the enjoyable activities it promises, and
- the opportunities for shopping and recreation that the place offers.

Since such a brochure has to appeal to as wide a range of interest groups as possible, it is necessary to

- research your subject well, and
- give accurate information on relevant aspects of the place.

To write the text of a brochure, you need to combine advertising and copywriting skills with an accurate recording of facts. You are, in fact, selling a destination, just as an advertisement sells a product, so your text should, necessarily, reflect this.

2.3.2 Informative articles for the tourist

These might be published in the Sunday supplement of a daily newspaper, in a Sunday newspaper or magazine, in general interest magazines that have a travel column, or in a travel magazine aimed at the general reader.

Here again, your target is the *potential traveller*, but your object is not to convince him to go to a particular place. You are, in fact, in the position of an adviser; so your aim should be to provide as honest and comprehensive an account of a place as possible.

Based on the contents of your article, a family might decide to spend its hard-earned money on travelling to a particular destination. You have, therefore, a serious responsibility to discharge, and you must do it in the best way you can.

- Your integrity,
- your impartiality, and
- your eye for detail

are what matter most in an article of this sort.

Look at this sentence, for example, to see how detail can be impartially and yet interestingly worked in: 'The plain formal eighteenth-century church stands in a little plaza where a market is held everyday of the week—ices and fruit, little sweet corncakes cooked while you watch and wrapped up in coloured paper like crackers, the blue Guadalupe glass, the colour of poison bottles, small crude toys.'

Most important of all, and this cannot be overemphasised, you must never write about a place you have not actually visited, by merely putting together information from guidebooks and brochures. This is not only dishonest and unfair to your readers, but will also inevitably show up in the quality of your writing; such a writer is not likely to get published anywhere.

a) In writing a **destination article**, some amount of description is necessary even essential, but the great danger here is the ease with which one can slip into clichés or into a copywriting sell that is useful for a travel brochure but disastrous for an informative article. Take the following passage:

The cultural heritage of the Mughals finds expression in this impressive fort, which is one of the most beautiful in the country. Its grandeur is awe inspiring and the many buildings inside its battlements are as lovely as its exterior.

It tells the reader nothing about the fort except that it was built by the Mughals and that it is likely to be large. It would be far more useful to write: the impressive red sandstone walls of the fort encircle imperial pavilions, pleasure palaces and a mosque built entirely of white marble.

You would, in this way, be quietly passing on useful bits of information: the fort wall is built of red sandstone; the mosque of white marble; the enclosure houses pavilions and pleasure palaces.

Apart from factual descriptions of places to see and things to do, an informative article should tell the reader

- something about the people of the area,
- the handicrafts that one may buy, and
- the food that is typical of the region.

b) Some publications require information on

- how to travel to the place to be visited,
- details of places to stay in, with an indication of what they cost, and
- suggestions, based on personal experience, about the best eating places.

This means checking on all these facts and perhaps *jotting down notes while*

you are on your travels, so as to make sure that you have all the information you need and that it is absolutely up-to-date and correct.

On his return from a month's holiday in South America, a young Canadian told us how frustrating it was to arrive at bus depots or railway stations, armed with 'up-to-date' arrival and departure timetables, only to be told that the timings had been changed the previous day or week, etc.

You can also inform the tourist of where to check for correct travel information, how to purchase tickets, how much to pay the porter and public transport vehicles. Also, give the approximate distance from the place of arrival to the major tourist attractions in a city, with important telephone numbers, and some idea of where he can get medical aid, if necessary.

c) Some magazines, such as airlines magazines, hotel magazines and some newspaper supplements, want a little more than just destination articles. With the frequent traveller and the non-Indian visitor to this country in mind, they seek to enrich a traveller's experience by helping him or her to learn something about the culture and environment of a region or city. You might write on the glass painting of Tanjore, the bidri work of Andhra Pradesh for example, or the folk singers of Rajasthan, or Bengali jewellery or contemporary art, or wildlife... the possibilities are endless.

To do an article of this sort requires hard work. It is not enough to merely see a place or a person. The writer needs to spend a great deal of time on research and on interviewing experts on the subject—either academics, or in some cases even illiterate craftspeople or folk performers who have information and knowledge. In other words, he must be intimately familiar with the subject before he starts writing for a potential traveller.

Considering the multiplicity of Indian languages, it is always a good idea to explain any non-English words used in the article. There are different ways of doing this. You may use footnotes or brackets, or you may even incorporate the explanation in the sentence itself, without making it arrest the flow of the narrative.

d) A relatively new but fast-growing segment of tourists today falls into the category '*adventure traveller*'. These are generally young tourists whose main interest is trekking, mountaineering, water sports, wildlife and so on. Information about such activities is limited but is now steadily increasing. You could do a piece designed specially for travel agents, or mountaineering societies or state tourism agencies. But you should make it very clear to your readers that you are merely collating published information. A better way to handle subjects of this sort is to actually experience the adventure for yourself and then report on it, with details of equipment required, routes taken, facilities available en route, etc. Ideally, you shall already have an interest in, say trekking, as only then you would be able to write about specific treks with the would-be trekker in mind.

Activity 1

Read carefully:

- A) There are few things as delightful as an amble through Vijayanagar's 26 square-mile area on a winter's day, with frequent stops to examine royal palaces, and harems, the soaring stone temples, with their intricately chiselled images, the water reservoirs, market-places, elephant-stables, mosques and gateways, each with its own wonders to be discovered. The city is built beside the Tungabhadra river in an extraordinarily undulating terrain of enormous rocks and boulders. The stone structures are built around and within the landscape, as if they've grown from it, rather than being imposed upon it from without. In the early morning or late evening, the city's natural environment casts its spell over visitors, tempting them to linger meditatively besides a carved palace or to sit in awed silence within the pillared hall of a temple.
- B) Perhaps the greatest joy of travelling in India is the seemingly inexhaustible number of little-known and delightfully different places that await discovery. This is true of every part of India, and nowhere is it

more evident than in the South, where a hospitable coastline has encouraged visits from every seafaring nation. The Romans came, and so did the Chinese, the Arabs, the Danes, the Portuguese and the French and the British. And, each group that touched Indian soil left an impress which has lingered, helping to shape cultural and social forms that are both varied and utterly unique.

Analyse these passages as writing meant for the general tourist, and try to see whether they succeed in (i) arousing curiosity, (ii) giving interesting/useful information. (60 words each)

(Check your answers with the hints at the end of the Unit)

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2.3.3 Articles aimed at the business traveller

The business traveller is a very important member of the travelling public and he or she requires information to fulfil clearly defined needs. In general, the business traveller has neither the time nor the inclination to visit monuments or centres of culture. What he or she wants to know is what sort of facilities are available in centres of commerce and industry across the country. He would like to read articles that give him up-to-date information on hotel accommodation, special packages and offers, restaurants and cuisine, airlines, travel and ticket details, and other facilities that can help endure the strain of frequent travelling.

The business traveller seldom has the time to read descriptive or informative pieces. What he or she wants is facts, up-to-the-minute reports on airline and hotel services and other such useful material. Here, the job of the travel-writer is to be in frequent touch with the organisers of these services and facilities and to report on them as accurately as possible. The public relations departments of airlines and hotels are always glad to provide assistance and information to a travel writer, and

- it is the job of the writer to collect such information,
- to verify it by seeing or sampling the facilities available in order to report on them to his reader.

In articles such as these, the style should be clear and concise.

2.3.4 Travel-trade reporting

In its widest sense, the term travel-trade includes travel agents, tour operators, government tourist offices, airlines, and hotels, since all these exist only because people travel. There are several publications whose purpose is to disseminate information for and about members of the travel trade. These are highly specialised trade publications which usually rely exclusively on their own staff to provide all their material.

Like other publications dealing with news and information, travel-trade magazines receive material in the form of press releases and photographs, and their staffers keep in touch with professionals in every area of the travel industry. If you choose to enter this sphere of travel writing, you will be dealing with

- very specific segments of travel news;
- personalities in the travel business;
- policies and plans affecting your readers; and
- the professionals in the travel line.

Activity 2

- i) What are the different types of travel articles current today? (50 words)
- ii) How does a general informative article differ from a promotional article? (50 words)
- iii) Refer to section 2.3.5 and discuss qualities that an article written for an armchair traveller should have. (50 words)

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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2.3.5 Articles for the armchair traveller

There is a section of the reading public which is intensely interested in exotic or unusual places, but prefers to avoid the dislocations and discomforts that such travelling often entails. This is the readership for which you should write first-person, anecdotal accounts of particular journeys. Among the best known travel writers of this genre are Paul Theroux, author of *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Jan Morris, whose books on Venice and New York and whose collection of essays are classics of their kind, and Eric Newby, author of *Slowly Down the Ganges* and *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*.

Accounts for the armchair-traveller

- are usually in the first person, and
- deal with the writer's experience of people he or she met along the way, unusual forms of transport used, exotic places, interesting experiences, etc.

The object is to re-create, as vividly as possible, unusual travel experiences.

However, a mere recital of your travels to an exotic destination can be crushingly dull.

- writing a travelogue requires a careful selection from a mass of experience, and
- a style of writing that is both lively and distinctively your own.

It may seem an easy thing to do, but is, in fact, the most difficult because you have to be honest and yet filter out all the boring bits so that your article is readable and enjoyable. Write-ups of this sort are also rather difficult to get published unless the subject is especially interesting, and the article exceptionally well-written.

To get a taste of this kind of good writing take a look at this brief passage (on a Tunisian oasis) written by Aldous Huxley (*The Olive Tree*, London, 1947).

A fertile oasis possesses a characteristic colour scheme of its own, which is entirely unlike that of any landscape in Italy or the north. The fundamental note is struck by the palms. Their foliage, except where the stiff shiny leaves metallically reflect the light, is a rich blue-green. Beneath them one walks in a luminous aquarium shadow, broken by innumerable vivid shafts of sunlight that scatter gold over the ground or, touching the trunks of the palm trees, make them shine a pale ashy pink through the subaqueous shadow. There is pink, too, in the glaring whiteness of the sand beyond the fringes of the oasis. Under the palms, beside the brown or jade-coloured water, glows the bright emerald green of corn or the deciduous trees of the north, here and there with the huge yellowish leaves of a banana tree, the smoky grey of olives, or the bare bone-white and writhing form of a fig tree.

2.4 DISCOVER YOUR PARTICULAR SKILL IN TRAVEL WRITING

As you can see, travel writing is a great deal more than simply describing your travels, or collecting and rewriting information on specific places. The kind of travel writing you choose to do will depend upon

- your personal style,
- your ability to travel, and
- your knowledge of travel-related subjects.

One person may do an excellent text for a brochure, but may turn out a poor article. Another may fail entirely in writing brochures but he may produce a highly successful piece for the travel trade.

2.5 SUMMING UP

To sum up, before you locate your subject, you should decide which—and you can choose more than one—of the types of travel writing, enumerated in the Unit, you would like to attempt. Also, identify your readers and ascertain your own skills and taste.

For example, if you visit, say, the city of Hyderabad, your choice of subject would be wide open. You could locate it in the area of history and architectural relics, or in the life in the old walled city—or the industrial activity that has grown up, or the universities and students there, and so on.

- The choice of subject will depend on your own taste and predilections,
- your knowledge of the publications which might accept your writing, and
- the type of reader you have in mind.

2.6 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Hints:

Passage A offers interesting information while passage B, perhaps arouses curiosity more effectively. Identify specific details in support of this view in the given passages.

Activity 2

- i) With the growth of the travel industry, several kinds of travel writings have appeared. The articles can be: (a) promotional, (b) generally informative, (c) meant for the business travellers, (d) in the nature of reports for the travel trade, or (e) exotic and entertaining, etc.
- ii) A promotional piece has the approach of salesmanship; it is meant to persuade and attract.

A general information article is more responsible, honest and comprehensive. It includes both the attractions and inconveniences of a destination, and it is more carefully researched.
- iii) a) usually written in the first person;
b) anecdotal;
c) carrying exciting descriptions of exotic places, unusual experiences and interesting people;
d) creative and exceptionally well-written.

Activity 3

Hints:

You can choose, for instance, a village which has some interesting ruins, not visited by the common tourists.

In a well-known city there can be interesting by-lanes, open spaces with an unexpected rural charm, small restaurants with good food and an old-world atmosphere, and so on.

Keep the following points in mind:

- i) identify your traveller;
- ii) plan a package tour, i.e. time, place, transport, accommodation, expenses etc.;
- iii) highlight local sights, sounds, crafts, personalities etc.; and
- iv) what, in your opinion, the traveller will gain from this trip.

2.7 GLOSSARY

You will find in this glossary a list of words referred to in this Unit

Copywriting: rewriting material (article) submitted by a correspondent/reporter, etc.

Genre: kind, form of writing

UNIT 3 TECHNIQUES OF TRAVEL WRITING

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Preparation—collecting information
 - 3.2.1 Consult a map
 - 3.2.2 Consult tourist literature
 - 3.2.3 Consult guidebooks
- 3.3 Visiting the place: keep an open mind
 - 3.3.1 Be observant
 - 3.3.2 Talk and listen
 - 3.3.3 Meet people on the spot
- 3.4 Using a library for verification of data
- 3.5 Writing the article—keep the reader in view
 - 3.5.1 Informed views
 - 3.5.2 Style—a blend of factual and creative writing
- 3.6 Writing for a magazine
- 3.7 Articles on specific topics
- 3.8 Summing up
- 3.9 Activities: aids to answers

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to tell you that a successful technique of travel writing depends on:

- cultivation of certain qualities: honesty, truthfulness, an open mind, adjustability, keen observation, a capacity to talk and listen to people with an unbiased mind, capacity to record facts and statements methodically, general awareness;
- adequate preparation before writing: collecting information, consulting maps, guidebooks, tourist literature, visiting libraries;
- cultivation of a style which is a blend of factual and creative writing, always keeping in mind the readership and the kind of publication for which you write.

When you finish reading this Unit, you will know how to train your mind for a travel writer's job, plan your preparatory reading in a methodical way, and know where to look for your material. You will also learn to read travel articles with a new understanding. Try to analyse them to see what technique has been used in them. And, finally, on the basis of all this, you should be able to develop a technique of your own.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Travelling is an experience that involves the traveller at many levels. So, the quality of what you write, inevitably depends not just on your immediate experiences but upon the entire range of your mind—all that you've ever been interested in, all the travelling you've ever done, your reading and conversations, your exposure to the various fields of knowledge, art, history and science, your visual perceptions and sensitivity, etc. In fact, your writing will reflect you and all the components that go into making you the individual that you are.

This is true of all writing, but it is especially true of travel writing, because a travel writer always tries to bring to life the multiplicity of all that he or she has seen, within the limit of a few thousand words. Beyond that, there's no secret formula for good travel writing, or for that matter, for any kind of writing. So read all you can, learn, ask questions, and you'll find that your writing grows and develops progressively.

You might think that because a travel writer needs to combine many skills, such as those of reportage, journalism, creative writing, etc., he does not need to develop any particular technique. But this is not true. It is precisely because of such diverse requirements, that travel writing requires you to exercise tight control over what you write. Too often, people think that if they can make something sound beautiful, it should be enough. But much more important than sounding beautiful is to sound true and honest.

If the truth is beautiful, then it is your job, as a travel writer, to express this beauty. And if it is unpleasant, you need to be honest about that too. This is the responsibility you will have to take upon yourself when you decide to be a travel writer, because many people will take your accounts of places, customs, people etc., to be the real story. You should, therefore, not embroider the truth out of recognition.

In the last two Units we have talked about the history and background of travel writing, and of its development. We have also seen how, when you actually come to such writing, you go about locating a subject, researching it, and gathering background material on it. In this Unit we will look at some of the techniques the travel writer needs to use, or be aware of.

Let us consider some of the kinds of things you should keep in mind when you begin to write.

3.2 PREPARATION—COLLECTING INFORMATION

Once you have decided what kind of travel story you are going to write, and who your readers are likely to be (casual Sunday newspaper readers, travel professionals, armchair travellers, would-be travellers, magazine readers, foreign visitors to this country, business travellers, and so on), you have to get down to the actual work of

- collecting information,
- visiting the place you have in mind, and
- settling down to write.

3.2.1 Consult a map

Some writers begin by looking at a map, because it can often act as a stimulus to speculation and can lead one to the kind of information that should be gathered. The proximity of a place to the mountains or the sea, its location and standing in relation to the neighbouring countries, both geographically and politically, its rivers and waterways, its railway connections and roads, all determine the kinds of experiences you are likely to encounter in that particular place. Thinking about all these things often helps to form an image in your mind; and based upon this image, you can seek information on those aspects of the place that are likely to be of interest to you and the editors for whom you are writing.

Looking at a map will perhaps set off a whole train of thoughts and provide worthwhile clues upon which to base further research. If, for example, you are planning to go to Ootacamund, you might look at a map and do some preliminary reading before making out a list of possible subjects which you can offer to your editors. Mulling over a map at this stage will tell you something about the terrain. Its nearness to Bangalore and Mysore, its accessibility or otherwise in terms of different forms of transport might point

the way to discovering something about the people who go to Ootacamund, and about the influences on the place. A little reading might prompt you to consider stories on tea estates, or spice plantations, or on the Toda tribals who live in this area.

Editors do commission stories, but they also rely heavily on writers to suggest possible subjects, emerging from the writer's own research and reading prior to actually going to a place. If you are going to an interesting location, it should be a good idea to get in touch with editors of a few publications in your area, and ask if they would be interested in stories about that place, and if so, which aspects would they be interested in specially. This does not mean that you will be commissioned to do a story, but there will certainly be a better chance of your story being accepted if you have an idea of what sort of material a particular publication is looking for.

3.2.2 Consult tourist literature

Once a map has sparked off your curiosity and set off a series of ideas, the next step can be to contact your local tourist office to gather as much material as possible. Tourist offices usually provide free brochures, leaflets and pamphlets which offer a fairly good outline upon which you can base further research, if you wish. For example, one of them may mention that a certain dynasty was responsible for building a certain palace, and further reading on this point might throw up an interesting story for you to write.

3.2.3 Consult guidebooks

Another source of good information are guidebooks, both foreign and Indian. But all such sources should be used judiciously, always keeping in mind what sort of travel writing you are doing, and what kinds of techniques you need to use for it.

For example, if you look at these sources carefully, you will find there is a clear difference in the writing style of a travel brochure issued by, say, the government of India, and that of a guidebook. The intention of one is to **promote** interest and of the other to **inform**. This does not mean that promotion of interest rules out information or vice versa; but obviously, if you are promoting a particular place you will emphasise its positive points and gloss over, or not even mention, the negative ones. For example, you do not mention that a place of great historical interest and architectural splendour has a lot of mosquitoes!

But if you are writing for a travel guide, you do need to speak of these things in order that your reader is prepared for the eventuality when he/she encounters it.

3.3 VISITING THE PLACE : KEEP AN OPEN MIND

In any case, you will set out on your travels armed with a certain amount of information and some anticipation of what you are going to see. But one of the delights (and dilemmas) of travelling in India is the fact that things seldom turn out the way you expect them to. The result is that you frequently have to revise your pre-conceived notions in order to adjust to a reality that may be quite different from what you had expected it to be. Thus a very important quality for the travel writer is simply this: be prepared for anything, and always to have an open mind that adjusts to things.

3.3.1 Be observant

Once you have reached your destination you will have to rely on your

- powers of observation and your
- sensitivity to the place, and
- its people

in order to gather all the first hand details that makes an article come alive. Here, another important point to keep in mind is that the travel writer needs not only to see, but also to hear; so seeing and absorbing is as important as talking to people.

3.3.2 Talk and listen

It is difficult to say what kind of a technique you should adopt when talking to people. Perhaps the only thing to remember here is that you should be in the position of an information seeker; so you should be careful how you talk to people. You should treat them with respect, listen to what they want to say rather than make them say what you want to hear. It’s, therefore, a fine balance you have to maintain.

3.3.3 Meet people on the spot

Students, a local shop-keeper or scooter-or-taxi driver, a local guide, are important from the point of view of getting the feel and flavour of the place. In addition to this, some magazines expect their writers to interview people on the travel trade, or to interview crafts people, or other travellers, in order to collect the material with which you will work. It is important to record verbal information for accuracy, and in some cases, for the local flavour of language. Hence it helps to keep a supply of notebooks readily available. There is nothing more frustrating than having to stop in the middle of an article because you can’t remember exactly what the woman who sold you a wall-hanging said.

3.4 USING A LIBRARY FOR VERIFICATION OF DATA

When the travelling is over, your notebooks full, your mind brimming with all that you’ve seen and heard and tasted, you might be able to sit right down and get on with the writing. On the other hand, depending on the subject you’ve chosen, you might find that you have still a great many blanks that need to be filled. This is probably the best time to head for a library and settle down to verify all your facts, consult maps once again, and gather all the details that you now know you are going to use. And when you’ve marshalled all your facts, you can get down to the actual writing of the article.

Activity 1

- i) What is the preparation required by a travel writer before he starts his work? (60 words)
- ii) Is it useful to talk to various people when you want to write about a place? What kinds of people should you approach? (40 words)

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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3.5 WRITING THE ARTICLE—KEEP THE READER IN VIEW

You must be very clear in your mind at this point whom you are writing for. If you're aiming your article at the reader of a Sunday newspaper, perhaps a potential tourist, then you should try to present as much accurate information as you can, backing this up with your personal experience, and the authentic, verified, details that only you can provide because you've been there.

A mere series of facts would sound rather dull.

3.5.1 Informed views

If you want to hold the attention of your reader, you have to enliven the text with **relevant** personal observations, quotes and anecdotes. To write this sort of article effectively, you have not only to remember details (with the help of notes, perhaps), but to put yourself in your reader's place.

If you were interested in going to, say, Mahabalipuram, what sort of details would you like to have? A poetic description of the sunset over the sea, or your response to the sculptures you saw may not be of much interest to the reader. The reader would rather like to know what it feels like being on the beach at sunset, or how he or she should make an effort to see a particular sculpture. But all this can be put across with a few, well-chosen specifics rather than a string of adjectives. This is where your experience can be of great use to your reader. Which sculpture did you find especially interesting? Where did you feel tempted to linger, and why? Did you have enough time if you went on a conducted tour? Was there anything that was especially worth buying? Equally important would be your considered opinion of what the best eating-places are, or whether the guides are worth hiring.

Your individual informed judgements and advice will be of greater use to the reader. 'The awe-inspiring fort' is easier to read than 'I was awe-struck by the grandeur of the fort', in terms of style. Both say the same thing but while one sounds like a cliché the other puts across a quality of the fort itself, as seen through your own eyes.

It is, therefore, your

- informed views and your
- factual style that will make the article worth reading, and not a recitation of facts culled from books, nor the hazy, imprecise adjective-ridden descriptions that often flow so easily from our pens.
- Also, perhaps, it is better to use the third person rather than the first in your writing.

3.5.2 Style—a blend of factual and creative writing

Style, in fact, is particularly important in travel writing because it is so easy to get carried away by mere descriptions and poetic phrases which are often not very substantial in the end. Many people tend to think that as long as such writing sounds good, it must be good. But don't forget that while it may sound good to you, your reader may be actually looking for something else in it. On the other hand, you should also guard against making your writing a mere collection of facts. That would sound too bald and dry.

So, as a travel writer, you'll have to use a blend of fact and creativity to make a place come alive to your readers. A good rule to follow is to always use

- very simple, straight and preferably short sentences and
- adjectives that fit.
- Try to avoid hyperbole as far as possible.

Being something of a journalist and a reporter, you will need to develop your powers of observation, and to learn how best to communicate what you want

to say, what you make of places, people, customs and festivals that you have seen. Perhaps the best way of doing this is to follow some simple rules: be

- factual
- imaginative
- sympathetic rather than patronising, and above all
- enjoy what you write!

Activity 2

Given below are two passages. Read them and write a brief critical evaluation (not more than 75-100 words) of each:

Passage 1

Coming into Abu Dhabi we passed a huge desert lot filled with parked cars. Import labels fluttered on their windshields. Dust had dulled their vivid colours of red, green, blue and gold: still clad in the protective film of grease in which they had left the production lines of Detroit and Tokyo, they stood like an army of raw recruits newly arrived on the battlefields. For every car which crashed, rusted to death, or just got junked out of pure boredom, there were ten more waiting to take its place, ready for a short, fast, dangerous life on the Abu Dhabi freeways. The average life expectancy of a car in the Gulf is two years. Two years, in fact, is a key measure of time here. It is the period in which investments are reckoned to make a full return. Two years in the Gulf have roughly the same weight as a decade in Europe. They represent as much of the past as can comfortably be remembered; as much of the future as any sensible man would dare to anticipate. In two years cars turn to scrap, contracts expire, investments come home, and the whole vastly accelerated cycle of life starts up again.

Passage 2

The sun set grandly over the sleeping city. As it went down, the sky was a haze of bright colours: warm and vibrant, rich and moving. Against the sunset the walls and turrets of the fort loomed large, witnesses to a past full of chivalry and valour. Within these walls, in times gone by, intrigues must have taken place, passions must have flowered, death must have brought its own rituals and mourning. Today, against this splendid sunset, the ancient fort called up memories of this glorious past. As we watched we visualised kings and queens, soldiers and farmers, artisans and crafts people who, jointly, had given life to this most impressive of monuments. Truly, the past has much to give us.

(Check for hints in 3.9)

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3.6 WRITING FOR A MAGAZINE

A travel article for a magazine generally allows a writer greater leeway in terms of style and content. Unlike newspapers, magazines tend to be in circulation for longer periods of time, for several weeks or even months. A person reading a magazine has the time and attention to give to anecdotes and factual details. In this sort of article, you can work in your impressions of places and people, history, interesting details, conversations, quotes, stories and incidents that enlivened your visit.

3.7 ARTICLES ON SPECIFIC TOPICS

Furthermore, travel writing for magazines, is not restricted to what are called 'destination pieces'. You could do an article on something as specific as the food of a place, bringing in local customs and history related to the ingredients, preparation and serving of particular kinds of food.

If you were writing about Kerala food, for example, your article could include (a) geography, which explains how coconut and certain kinds of fish and vegetables came to be so widely used in Kerala; (b) religion, which is the origin of various kinds of cuisine and variations in cooking styles; (c) history, to explain certain vessels and cooking techniques.

Again, you might write on the crafts of a region, or even on one particular craft that is special to a place or culture. If you have an interest in wild life or a specific period of history, or gardens, you might be able to vivify a place by writing on this particular aspect of it.

3.8 SUMMING UP

To sum up, the techniques of travel writing need careful planning and cultivation.

- You need to change your attitudes and clear your mind, as far as possible, of prejudices;
- develop your powers of observation, learn to listen patiently and carefully to people with a view to ascertaining their views and feelings, keeping your own judgement reserved; and
- avoid intrusion of your own point of view;
- After due preparation, having gathered and recorded information, you should choose a subject, and
- write your article to suit the requirements of your readers and of the magazine which has accepted, or is likely to accept your article for publication; and
- remember to always write your piece in a style which is both informative and lively.

Activity 3

Write two separate paragraphs, each in a different style, about any **one** particular tourist attraction. Your paragraph should be within 80-100 words. (Keeping in mind the word-limit, it will be easier for you to handle a single monument, or a particular aspect of a resort: sports activities, eating places, places of entertainment, etc.).

Paragraph 1 should be factual

Paragraph 2 should be impressionistic.

(Check with hints for activity 3 in 3.9)

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3.9 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) a) Consult a map of the place to be visited (road and rail connections, geographical location, climate, government etc.);
- b) consult tourist offices and literature;
- c) consult guidebooks for precise information;
- d) visit libraries for verification of data and further information.
- ii) Yes. By this we get (a) first hand information and details, (b) the local point of view, (c) the knowledge of how various persons/groups look at things and events, (d) the feel and flavour of places and times.

People you meet can be

- students
- local shop-keepers
- scooter/auto or taxi drivers
- vendors, pedlars. You can think of others.

Activity 2

Hints:

When examining a passage keep the following in mind:

- a) What does it aim at?
- b) Is it well written?
- c) Does it give interesting or useful information?
- d) Is it merely impressionistic?
- e) Does it make a point?
- f) Does it absorb the reader/give pleasure in reading?

Activity 3

In the factual paragraph try to be brief without being too dry. In the impressionistic paragraph your emphasis should be on being engaging, creative and readable.

UNIT 4 TRAVEL WRITING: ALLIED MATERIAL—PHOTOGRAPHS AND SKETCHES

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 What kinds of pictures to choose
- 4.3 What makes a picture good for reproduction
 - 4.3.1 Black and white photographs
 - 4.3.2 Colour photographs
 - 4.3.3 Colour slides
- 4.4 Cropping : making pictures relevant and effective
- 4.5 Photographs : cropping and masking
- 4.6 Illustrations and sketches
- 4.7 Captioning of pictures
- 4.8 Summing up
- 4.9 Activities : aids to answers
- 4.10 Glossary
- 4.11 Additional readings for Block 3

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to tell you the significance of photographs and sketches in travel articles:

- what kinds of pictures to choose to support the written content;
- what photographs are technically good for reproduction;
- how **masking** or **cropping** has to be done to make the pictures relevant, well-composed and striking;
- how sketches can be used effectively in an article; and
- how to give striking captions to pictures that you print.

When you have finished reading the Unit, you will be able to

- take or select suitable pictures for a piece of writing, after having acquired the necessary technical knowledge of photography;
- judge which pictures would reproduce well;
- choose the right section or area of the picture and mask the rest;
- decide when to use black and white prints; and
- when to use colour-photos or slides;
- you will also be able to decide whether, for a particular piece of writing, sketches would be more effective than photographs; and
- you will, further, learn the art of captioning pictures.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Units of the Block you have been told about the background material you need for travel writing, the way to go about locating a subject, and the techniques that this kind of writing requires. In this Unit, we shall talk about photographs and illustrations as means of supplementing and enlivening the written content of an article. It has been said that a photograph is worth a thousand words. Nothing could be truer on the role of the visual in travel writing.

4.2 WHAT KINDS OF PICTURES TO CHOOSE

In travel writing, it is necessary to recreate the mood, and the ambience that reflect a destination. Pictures should, therefore, be selected that bring out whatever is unique to that destination. For instance, there is something typical about Goa, or Kashmir, or Kerala. Pictures must bring out the uniqueness of these destinations.

Pictures must also be used to **support the actual text** of the story. For instance, there could be a particular aspect of a destination that is being covered exclusively—the gardens of Bangalore or the beaches of Goa. While selecting pictures, the entire story must be gone through very carefully to see its slant.

It is possible, that an article may deal exclusively with the beaches of Goa, and not a word may be mentioned about churches. Alternatively, the article may be about the beaches of Goa, but it may also mention the sights and the churches of old Goa. As another option, it may focus on the beaches of Goa, mention the churches as a point of good sightseeing, and also talk of the accommodation or beach resorts or hotels of the place. In each of the above three cases, **photographs must correspond to the text of the story. Their use must also be proportionate to the story.**

It would be meaningless to have pictures on sightseeing with the article focusing only on beaches.

4.3 WHAT MAKES A PICTURE GOOD FOR REPRODUCTION

In this section, we will sub-divide the pictures into colour, and black and white. Black and white pictures may seem out of date with so much being now featured in colour. It is true that colour gives an obviously glossier look but the role of black and white photography should not be underestimated.

4.3.1 Black and white photographs

Black and white photographs must always highlight the details of the subject. If the picture is patchy, the reproduction too will be patchy. Tonal variation, i.e. depth of each detail that is being shown, must stand out clearly in the picture. If a photograph has an overall paleness, it will never reproduce well.

Also you cannot enlarge a black and white print too much. If you do so, you will make the picture look **grainy** and it will lose its depth. It would be better to get a print closer to the size required made from the black and white negative, and then use it accordingly.

For a black and white photograph to reproduce well, it must necessarily be glossy and not matt finished.

There must also be no scratches on the prints. These will otherwise also show on the reproduction.

Pictures should never be bent because the creases will mar them.

So, a picture should always be held together with a sheet with the help of paper clip, it should never be stapled.

When enclosing pictures in the post, it is always better to use sheets of cardborad to ensure they don't fold or twist.

Sheets of tissue paper between prints will ensure that they do not stick to each other due to dampness or humidity.

The use of cello tape is not recommended as it can damage the picture when it is removed, also;

the stickiness the cello tape leaves behind can damage other pictures stacked with it.

4.3.2 Colour photographs

Colour photographs are basically available in two forms—colour slides and colour prints.

What is normally in vogue these days are colour prints. In recent years the cost of colour photography and colour prints has drastically come down.

It will be wrong to say that colour prints do not reproduce well. If the colour print has all the depth and the variation that the subject requires, it will reproduce satisfactorily so long as the picture is not being enlarged too much. Reproduction in the same size or close to it is very safe.

Whenever a good colour print has to be reproduced in a larger size, it is better to revert to its colour negative and thereby make a larger colour print, to be sent later for processing.

Again, in colour prints, it is important to note the depth of each colour. A colour photograph in which the picture is often either not sharp enough, or it is too pale, is difficult to reproduce. It must have enough colour content for a good reproduction.

4.3.3 Colour slides

Colour slides can be enlarged to an appreciable degree but the results will differ from one slide to another, depending upon the depth that is available in the slide. In some cases, a colour slide may be enlarged to 30" × 40" postersize and still reproduce well.

In choosing a colour slide, due care must be taken to ensure that the surface of the picture is untouched; the side with the emulsion on it intact; there should be no scratch on it, otherwise the damaged slide will result in poor reproduction.

4.4 CROPPING: MAKING PICTURES RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE

With the revolution in printing technology, letter press printing is now a thing of the past. Modern technology permits laser scanning and printing in multi-colour by the offset process. This throws up fresh challenges in the judicious use of photographs. The important thing when choosing the section of the picture which is to be used, is to see that it **dramatizes the subject**.

Let us assume that the story is on Calcutta and we are showing the place where Rabindranath Tagore lived. The photograph reveals certain features of his residence. In front of the house is a straight driveway. The gate is ordinary. There is nothing unusual in the driveway. We should not use the picture in full but mask or eliminate all unnecessary details and highlight only the building.

Alternatively, if we wish to give an illustration of the hill slopes and the valley of Gulmarg with sheep grazing in a green meadow, the full visual impact will come out only if we reproduce the full picture. This impact will be further heightened if the size of the picture that we are taking for reproduction is large. A large visual area reproduced on a small scale on the printed page will not bring out the details.

Again, suppose we wish to use a picture of sheep grazing in a meadow but there is virtually no grass to be seen and the foreground is ugly. In such a case the picture should not be used at all.

But if we have to use it for lack of an alternative, masking should be done to eliminate undesirable areas.

Picture selection must also bring out the range of a subject.

The pictures chosen must correspond with the subject of the story.

Duplication of an area in more than one picture must be avoided. There is no point in showing the same terrain and subject in more than one picture with the only difference perhaps being in the angle of the photography.

Activity 1

- i) What is the function of pictures in an article? How should these be chosen?
- ii) What are the technical points to remember about black and white and colour photographs?
- iii) What is cropping masking? What is its purpose?
(50-60 words each)

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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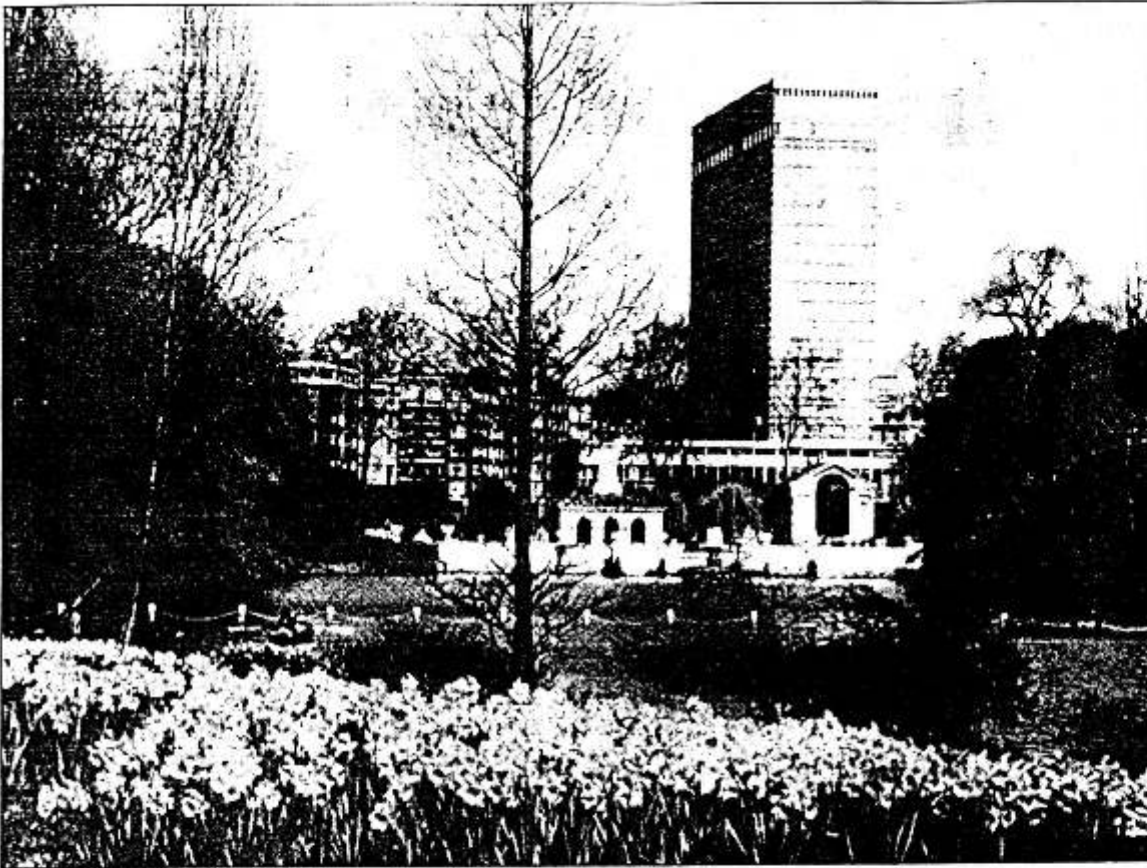
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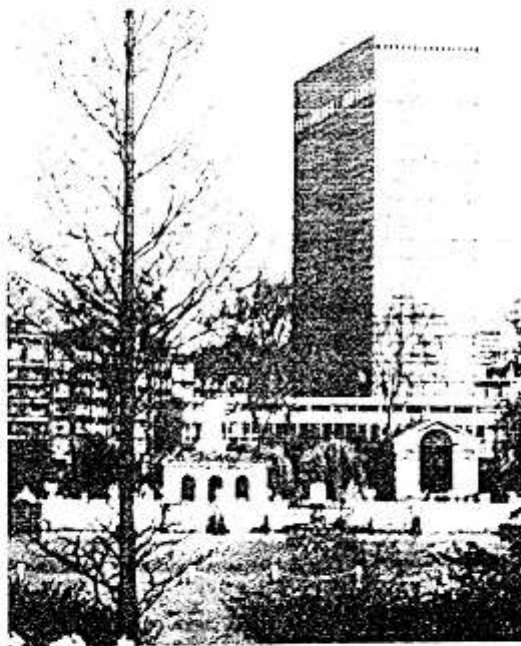
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4.5 PHOTOGRAPHS: CROPPING AND MASKING

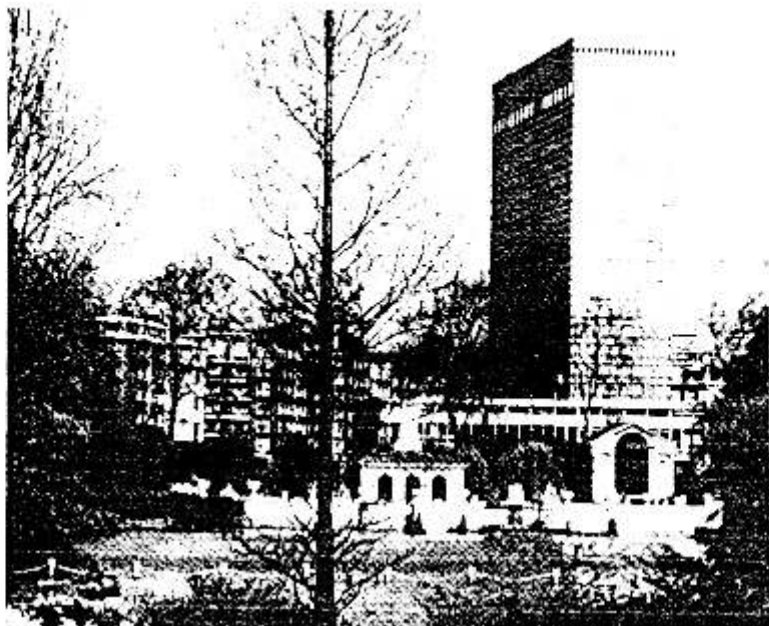
Picture 'A' is an example of an overview of lawns and building. The question is what do we want to focus attention on. Also, what is the size of the picture that we will eventually produce. The overall view, if printed in a small size, will not be definite enough. If we impose the mask as shown, we can highlight the building area which we want to show. The first mask has been used where the picture was required in a vertical position. In the second mask, the picture has been used in a horizontal frame.



Picture A



Picture A — First Mask

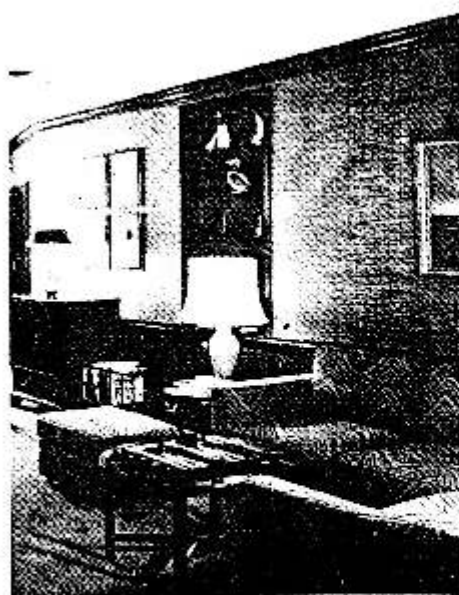


Picture A — Second Mask

In the picture marked 'B' there is again a full view of the entire interior of a room. The left side in the picture appears too white and perhaps will not be good enough to reproduce. However, we want to show the interior of this room, and would therefore take a portion of the picture which has the best reproduction quality. In the mask area we have chosen, the tonal quality of black and white is so good that it is bound to reproduce well. Notice that there are no shades of grey as such but very definite images of black and white

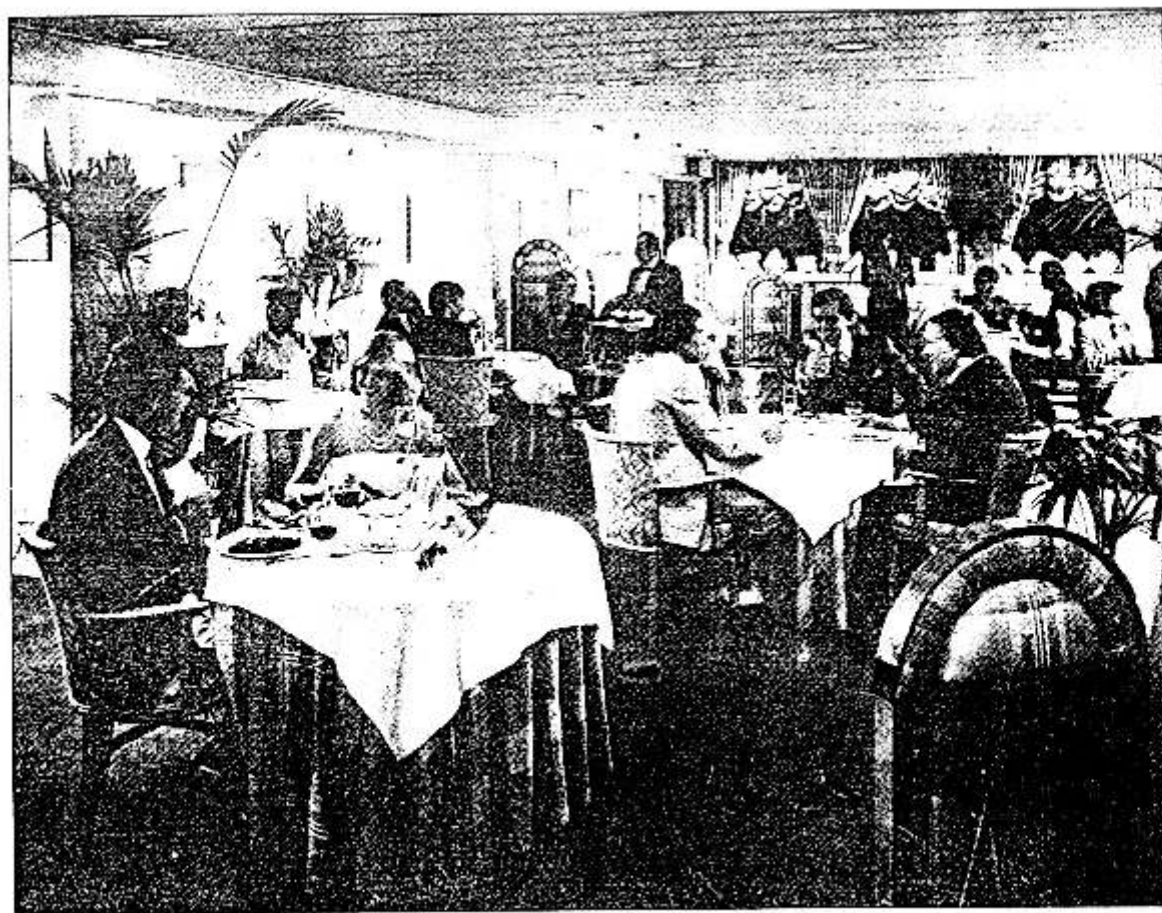


Picture B



Picture B — Mask

Picture 'C'—This is perhaps a good picture but there is too much of detail. This picture will again require a large print area to reproduce in equal size. If this picture was reduced to half size or quarter size, the details would not emerge so sharply. Depending on whether we need the photograph in a vertical or horizontal position, we have shown two masks in different sizes which would highlight the interesting areas. Notice that in the horizontal mask, the characters are very sharply focused. In the larger photo area available to us, the three characters would have got lost.



Picture C

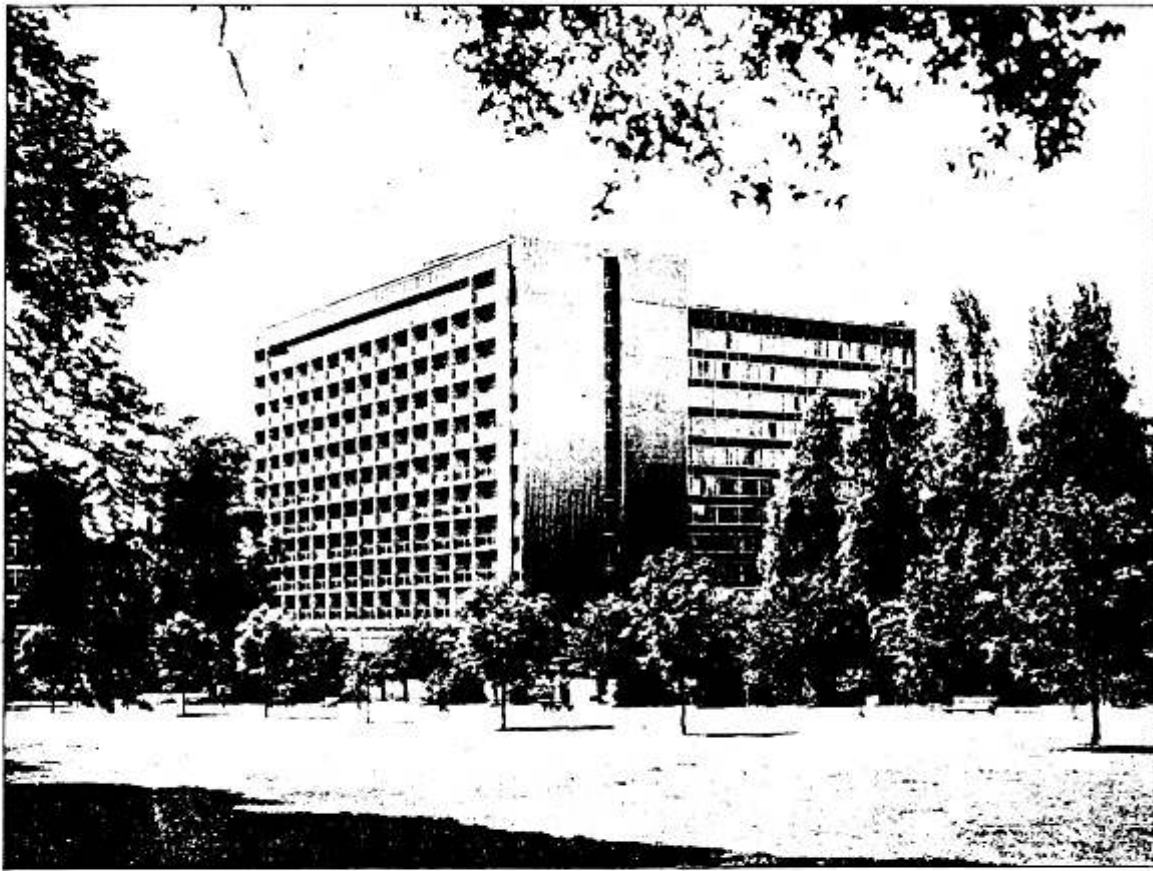


Picture C — First Mask

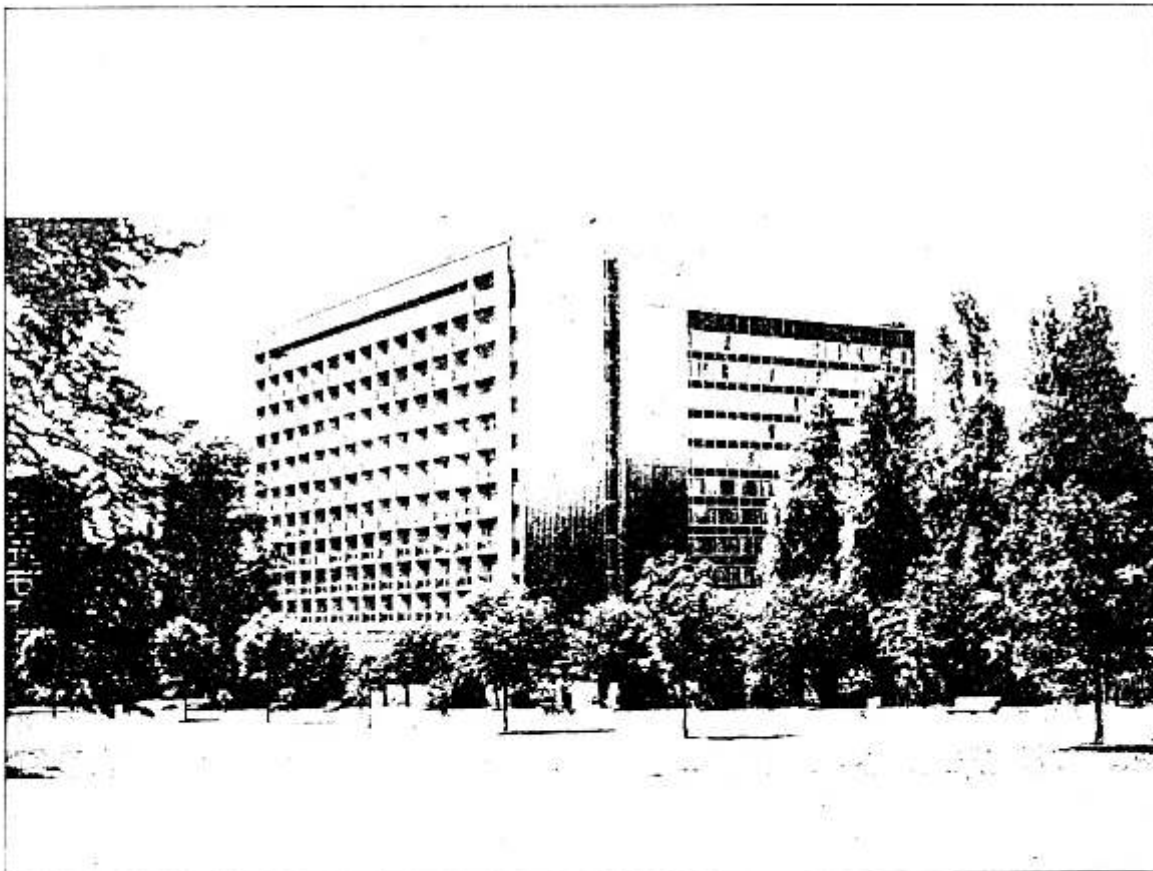


Picture C — Second Mask

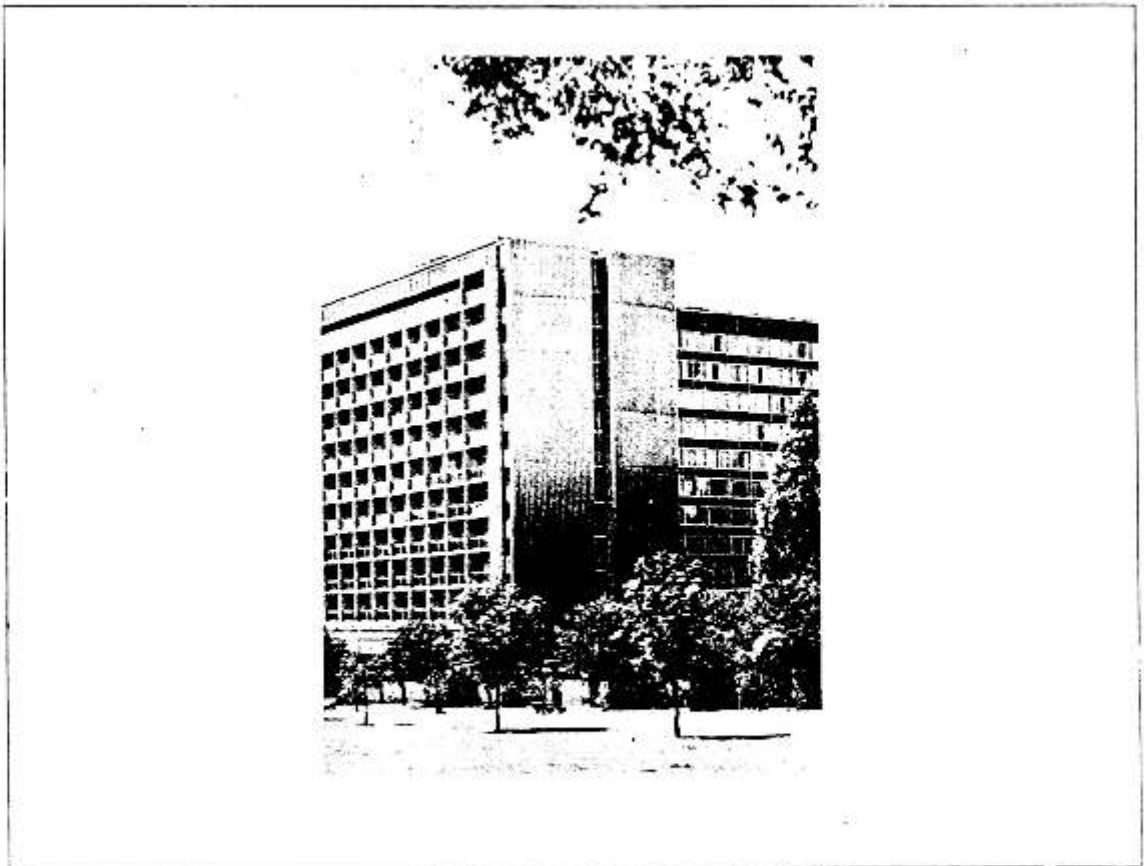
Picture 'D'—This is an ordinary mask position where simple focus on a specific area has been undertaken. The area is limited and if we made a vertical mount of a similar size, the building would get cut. Proportionate spacing is attained in the horizontal frame.



Picture D



Picture D — First Mask



Picture D — Second Mask

4.6 ILLUSTRATIONS AND SKETCHES

Illustrations and sketches can often be used as substitutes for actual pictures. Illustrations are particularly suitable where the subject requires light hearted treatment.

Normally sketches and illustrations should be used by themselves for they do not harmonise with photographs.

You should choose **either** pictures or illustrations, but **never both**.

Illustrations can be very effective if they highlight a particular aspect of a story. They are generally used to pinpoint references. Illustrations can be very effective in the treatment of buildings, as they can bring out architectural detail or the symmetry of design in a monument better than any photograph.

4.7 CAPTIONING OF PICTURES

Pictures must always be captioned and the more detailed the caption, the better.

The simplistic caption, stating the obvious, can at times sound absurd 'Scenery of Gulmarg', is factually correct, but it is visible to any reader. It is more important to say something that relates the picture to the story and brings out what is striking in it. You can, for example, say, 'the pine-clad hills at Gulmarg rise to awesome heights, as the grazing sheep dot their smooth, grassy slopes'.

Again, suppose you are captioning a room in a hotel. Simply to say 'Room in a hotel' will be meaningless. It will be more interesting to bring out the special feel of the interior in your caption, 'The red-carpeted room of the Savoy, with its plush settee and chairs, and the sumptuous, luxuriously cushioned bed'.

4.8 SUMMING UP

To sum up, pictures and illustrations have an important role in travel writing. They serve to

- elucidate,
- enliven, and
- enlarge the story.
- Photographs should be chosen to suit the subject and story.
- Cropping or masking of photographs, to make them more relevant or more effective, is important and necessary.
- You should have some technical knowledge of photography in order to handle photographs in colour and in black and white, to know how much enlargement they can stand, which kind of paper should be used for prints, etc.
- Both photographs and illustrations should not be used for the same piece of writing.
- With certain subjects, illustrations can be more telling and relevant than photographs.
- And, finally, you should learn to give striking captions to your photographs and illustrations.

Activity 2

Recollect a visit you have made to an interesting region or city. Imagine you are writing an article on it. Make a selection from the pictures that you might have taken. You can also cut pictures from a magazine.

Consider where you would place them. What kind of masking or cropping would you do? Write down why you think your chosen pictures would add to the interest of your article.

(Check your answer with the hints given in 4.9)

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4.9 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Pictures (a) supplement the writing, (b) explain and enliven it, (c) give a clearer idea of objects or scenes described, (d) add a visual dimension and so deepen one's understanding of the subject.
Pictures should be chosen (a) to bring out the character or uniqueness of a destination, (b) to support the written text, (c) to highlight a point of statement.
- ii) Black and white photographs : (a) should not be patchy and should have clear tonal variation to reproduce well, (b) get grainy if enlarged too much, (c) are better with a glossy rather than a matt finish, (d) should not be allowed to bend or crease. Colour photographs: (a) reproduce well if they have depth of colour and sharpness, (b) should be enlarged from the negative rather than the print, (c) if pale and lacking in colour content cannot be reproduced well. Colour slides can be enlarged to an appreciable degree.
- iii) Cropping (clipping) or masking (covering some sections with paper etc.) is done to eliminate undesirable areas in a picture. It is done to make the picture (a) more relevant, (b) more dramatic and interesting, (c) bring out a point better, (d) better composed.

Activity 2

Hints

Write a brief outline of your intended article, make a selection of the pictures to be used, and consider where to place them and what cropping or masking would be necessary. Apply whatever you have learnt from this Unit.

4.10 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit:

Glossy print: term given to quality of photo-print where surface of paper used is high gloss and shiny. There is no texture on the surface of the paper.

Matt finish: this is with texture, is unglazed. Prints are easier to handle but is unfit for printing.

Emulsion side: the side on which picture is formed by camera. Processing is done from emulsion side.

Tonal variation: changed intensity of tone. Colours of black and white in any black and white photograph appear in different shades of grey. In printing, tonal variation may not be entirely transferable.

Off-set process: process of printing by transfer from film positive to plate to paper

4.11 ADDITIONAL READINGS FOR BLOCK 3

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Davey, Frank. *The Abbotsford Guide to India*, Toronto: Press Porcepic, 1986.

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Ibn Batuta: Travels in Asia and Africa, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1929. (rep. 1983).

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The Reader's Digest Book of World Travel, London: The Reader's Digest Association Ltd.



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4

INTERVIEWS

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BLOCK 4 INTERVIEWS

Interviews have become very important and play a large role in present-day journalistic writing. Block 4 is devoted to a discussion of this theme.

In Unit 1 we talk to you about the importance and uses of interviews in feature writing, the scope and the types of interviews, and the way to prepare for and successfully conduct an interview. You are then told how to record an interview and reconstruct it later for your writing.

Unit 2 is about preparing your questions for an interview. You are told to write down your questions in advance in a logical order, to avoid questions which show bias or draw only 'yes' or 'no' answers and to have a clear focus for your questions. You are informed about the proper technique of asking questions. This consists in being flexible, being ready to ask improvised, supplementary and follow-up questions. You are then given a few tips about how to keep an interviewee in good humour, how to handle a difficult, evasive interviewee, and how to overcome any resistance that you might come across.

Having learnt about how to prepare and conduct an interview and the way to list and arrange your questions, you are now ready to be told a few things about the mechanical and other aids that can be used at interviews. Unit 3 advises you on using extracts, photographs, audio and video devices like tape-recorders and video cassettes. You are informed about the advantages and disadvantages of such electronic aids.

The last Unit is about the editing and organization of material collected at interviews. You are told how to give focus and structure to your materials, how to introduce and handle anecdotes, quotations and paraphrase in your writing, and how to revise and rewrite what you have written. Finally, you are told that balance and credibility are of prime importance in any piece of writing.

UNIT 1 PRELIMINARIES

Structure

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- 1.2 Importance and uses of interviews in feature writing
- 1.3 Interview articles
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 - 1.3.2 Types: personality-based; subject-based
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- 1.8 Hints on follow-up
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- 1.10 Activities: aids to answers
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1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to show you that

- interviews play an important role in feature writing, often making it fascinating or exciting for the readers;
- very interesting articles can be written, often are, based exclusively on interviews; and
- the art of interviewing needs careful cultivation.

When you finish reading the Unit, you will be able, it is hoped, to take a fresh interest in interviews and in human personality. You will know how interviews can throw light, sometimes unexpected light, on problems, and can be a source of fresh knowledge, fresh ideas and insights. You will also have some knowledge of the art of interviewing, having learnt how to prepare for an interview, how best to conduct yourself during it, how to gain the confidence of the interviewee, and how to record the interview and reconstruct it later, when it is over.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit does not tell you everything about interviews and the use writers can make of them. Even a whole set of Units cannot do that. What it will try, instead, is to provide the basic information and some insights to arouse your interest and get you started. Success will, of course, depend upon your own efforts.

1.2 IMPORTANCE AND USES OF INTERVIEWS IN FEATURE WRITING

People often read newspapers or magazine articles casually while *doing something* else as well. An interesting fact or observation may hold their attention for a while, but seldom do they have the time to go back to it to discover why it was that their attention was attracted. As a writer you will perhaps do that, and then you will find that more often than not the item of interest was based on an interview.

News reports, features, or documentary stories which have the power to grip the attention of readers, often have interviews as their bases. Fact-finding and reporting often rely on the tool of interviewing.

Personality profiles of prominent persons like authors, scientists, politicians and social workers are one obvious product of interviews. But there are countless other uses. The story of an institution is often made interesting by quoting from conversations with people in it. A local community issue or a larger socio-political problem can be brought to life by talking to the various sections of people affected by it. There is even a new kind of non-fiction, based on 'saturation reporting', which draws extensively on detailed interviews and related research by reporters, to communicate information and insights on matters of contemporary interest.

1.3 INTERVIEW ARTICLES

Interview articles are those that rely principally on interviews. Although we shall be dealing with such articles here, the principles of interviewing discussed remain valid even where interviews are put to any other use.

1.3.1 Scope

Interview articles can vary in scope and emphasis. They may relate to some of the primary functions that mass communication media perform: information, education/motivation/persuasion, and entertainment. The best interview articles will combine all three functions.

1.3.2 Types: personality based; subject-based

Interview articles may be personality based, where you interview a prominent person either for his views on the subject of his achievement, or to find out what personal traits make him an achiever, or both. In this kind of interview the subject need not even be prominent but may be someone in your local community with an interesting view of life or an unusual occupation or hobby. For instance, you may remember reading about freakish men and women who at times eat, dance, talk, cycle, or trek themselves to exhaustion to get into the **Guinness Book of World Records**. What is it that makes them tick? To take something less obvious and not written about as frequently, how often have you bought woollens from a Tibetan refugee, or eaten at a Chinese restaurant, or had your hair styled at a Chinese hairdresser's? Has it occurred to you to explore where or how these Tibetans and Chinese live? What is their community life like? Where do their children go to school? These and countless other questions must seem worth investigating. Let's put it in another way: they are waiting for you to explore them.

Interviews can also be subject-based, where a specialist on a subject—nuclear physics, urban conservation, rural development or tax reform, to quote a few instances—can be asked questions to get a range of information and insights. An extension of this approach is the 'symposium interview', where a panel of experts with a wide range of views are asked to speak on a particular issue, providing answers rich in variety, depth, and perspective.

Activity 1

Test yourself:

- i) What are the various purposes for which interviews can be used? (60–70 words)
- ii) What sections of the people would you interview if, for example, bank rates are enhanced/lowered? Give reasons. (60–70 words)

(Check your answers with the hints given at the end of this Unit)

1.4 THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

Getting people to talk is an art that should be learned, even if some of us are better at it than others. Get to know what interests people, and learn to ask questions that get out of them what is most interesting or vivid in their lives. Recording their responses, so that your writing can be made lively by quoting what they have actually said, is a further step. The art of interviewing can be studied under two heads, preparation for and conduct of it.

1.4.1 Preparation

Before you come to the actual interview, you need some careful preparation for it. You have to plan and take several steps in this regard.

- **Choosing people for an interview**

Choosing the people you want to interview is the first step. You may know a person in your locality who has achieved something. Why not start there? Or choose a subject of your own interest—cricket, flower arrangement, wild life, or whatever—and find some persons who will offer some special insights by virtue of their position or expertise. Or, quite simply, look around for the social worker, or the dog-catcher of the municipality, or the fast-food restaurant owner, who can be made to talk about aspects that touch all our lives. You can also choose a news event and find people who may provide an unusual point of view—someone who has been on a hijacked plane, a witness to a communal riot or some other kind of public disturbance, or victims of breakdown of electricity so frequent in our cities. To sum up, any person can be interesting. The challenge is to focus on what makes some people more interesting and draw on that. Guidance on how to focus your questions will be offered in the next Unit.

- **Setting up the interview**

Once you have selected the person, as well as the main focus of your interview, you should make an appointment, either by telephone or letter, or in person. You may

find it difficult or surprisingly easy to get an appointment, depending on a range of circumstances. In general, give the interviewee sufficient notice and a clear idea of the purpose of the interview. Also, decide in advance whether it is better for you to interview the person at his residence or office, or at a neutral place, a club or quiet restaurant, where conversation can be uninterrupted. But remember that you can only suggest the place: the decision would be up to the interviewee. Be ready also to tell your interviewee how much time you expect the interview to take. This can often be extended if your subject gets interested in the discussion and wishes to continue. But it is always polite to tell him in advance how much time you expect him to give you.

- **Asking for a follow-up**

If one session proves insufficient, ask for another. The more time you give to planning these matters, the more you will impress the interviewee with your earnestness. And first impressions are important, especially where you are approaching a stranger, although after the interview you may get closer to each other.

- **Getting ready for the interview**

Do whatever homework you can on the subject, before the interview takes place. You will not earn the interviewee's respect if you ask questions seeking information that is easily available. If you are interviewing a prominent person, find out in advance what he has done and what he is doing at present. If you are discussing a theme, read up the basic information so that you can ask meaningful questions, answers to which may throw new light on the subject. Try to know what you can about your person or subject, in advance, whenever possible. You may need to visit the library, to get your information from a *Who's Who* or an encyclopaedia or news clippings or books on the subject. If you are writing a personality profile, talk to people who know the interviewee. This can give you insights into his likes and dislikes, his pet theories and aversions, his hobbies, his experiences, and much other story material, which can help you frame questions during the interview.

At the actual interview, all these efforts will yield fruit. Seldom will an interviewee fail to note the trouble you have taken to know his subject, or his achievement. Likewise, the lack of such preparation will also show. To sum up, an exciting discussion seldom occurs by accident; with adequate preparation and planning, you make it happen.

- **Keep your questions ready**

Always make a list of questions you wish to ask, and have it handy. It will save you the embarrassment of running out of ideas in mid-interview. Your interviewee may be friendly and co-operative, or withdrawn and shy; in some cases, he will be overly talkative but deliberately evasive. No matter which of these types you are interviewing, a list of questions will come in handy. More guidance on this aspect is offered in the next Unit.

- **How to frame your questions**

What use you make of the material you get out of the interview will depend upon who your reader will be. Form a clear idea of the publication or market you will be writing for, and keep your reader in mind, as you plan the interview, while you conduct it, and as you write it up. Many mistakes can be avoided if you know your reader and use that knowledge to guide you. Often, a close study of the newspaper or magazine you wish to write for can tell you what your readers are like. Once you have identified your reader, look among your friends, relatives, and acquaintances for a person like that, and keep that person constantly in mind. What will interest him or put him off? How much would he want to know?—and so on.

- **Arriving for the interview—punctuality and dress**

Be punctual. If you are fractionally late owing to some reason, explain it briefly and honestly, without going into too much detail. Remember throughout that you are trying to establish goodwill and confidence between yourself and the interviewee. Dress neatly, neither casually nor extravagantly. First impressions count. To give an example, a business executive might more readily talk to you if you are conservatively dressed, but if you are seeing an artist or painter, jeans and T-shirt might have the same effect. If you are interviewing rural folk, a dhoti-kurta or salwar-kameez might be appropriate. But important as those things are, they should not make you self-conscious, or lead to a self-caricature. It is important to be true to yourself.

1.4.2 Conduct

After you have gone through, in an ordered manner, the necessary preparations, your next concern will be the actual conducting of the interview. It would be useful to keep in mind certain things when you are taking the interview.

- **Importance of being relaxed during the interview**

Be as relaxed as you can, even if you face a VIP. Do not be subdued by the fear that you are imposing on the other person or invading his privacy. Your fear may be totally unfounded. Remember that you have a reason to be there, and the person asked you in. Most people, you will discover, like to talk about themselves, even if some do it less readily than others.

- **Getting on to the interviewee's wave-length**

Ask your questions as pleasantly and informally as possible, once you have established mutual understanding. If the interviewee is busy, a minute or two on the purpose of the interview should suffice. If he is reluctant or hostile, a more subtle or gradual approach would be needed. For instance, if you are talking to a musician who is reluctant to talk about himself, choose an instrument or a piece of music he likes to talk about—and this is where your advance planning and research will help you. Get him so interested in the subject that he can relax and open up.

- **The first few minutes are important**

Remember that what you do, say or ask in the first few minutes is crucial; the interviewee will be sizing you up; he will be judging whether you genuinely care for him and what he wants to talk about. His responses will depend upon how he judges you, regardless of your intentions.

- **Keeping the interview moving; avoiding interruption**

Remember that the interview belongs to the interviewee. It is not an opportunity for you to air your own views or reveal your learning. Your job is to keep the interview moving. Ask short, precise questions; if you make any comments, their sole purpose should be to push the interview forward. Your comments should be such that the interviewee can use them to make further observations. Also, do not try to show off. You may have done a lot of homework, read much on the subject; however, you did all that to be able to ask intelligent questions, not to prove that you know as much of the subject as the interviewee does. Showing off may have a bad effect on the interviewee; he may think of you with contempt and hostility. Also, learn not to interrupt the interviewee when he is in the middle of a sentence, an idea or an argument. Your interruption may make your interviewee lose the thread of his talk. Also, he may consider you rude. If the interviewee is straying from the subject, guide him back to it gently, but not in the middle of a sentence.

Activity 2

- i) State briefly the points to remember in the preparation and conduct of an interview. (50 + 50 words)

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- ii) Select a few issues of your favourite magazine or Sunday newspaper. Select 10 articles which are based on interviews. Draw up a chart* of the kinds of persons interviewed in those articles. Note how many are specialists, authorities, or prominent people, and how many are ordinary people with interesting ideas. (* Chart provided below)

Serial No.	Name of Interviewee	Profession	Source of article
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

(Check your answers with the hints given at the end of the Unit)

1.5 RECORDING OF THE INTERVIEW

Much may take place during the interview, and you have the task of recording it as faithfully and usefully as possible. You will need the aid of memory and of notes taken while the interview is on.

1.5.1 Trained memory: note-taking

Train your memory so that your notes can be as few as possible. Eye contact is important in a conversation and you will lose it too soon if you take copious notes. Restrict your notes to key words and concepts, and to memorable quotes. Keep your notebook or folded paper to a size that is not obtrusive, but convenient. Take notes extensively only if the person wishes to be quoted verbatim. In that case, you will not lose his interest in what you are doing, and you can help him along by looking up as frequently as possible to show him that you care. And remember that observing his gestures, physical movements, tone, and attitude are as important as capturing his words.

1.5.2 Too obvious note-taking: using a tape-recorder

Obvious note-taking or a tape-recorder can put the interviewee on his guard, unless the subject of your investigation is so sensitive that you need the legal protection of the recorded tape. The merits and demerits of using tape recorders will be discussed separately in another Unit, but the experience of accomplished journalists shows us that extensive summaries of long interviews are possible with minimal notes and a trained, selective memory.

1.6 RECONSTRUCTING THE INTERVIEW

As soon as possible after the interview, you should fill in your notes, using the exact words and phrases of the interviewee to the best of your recollection. You should do this while those words are still fresh in your mind. Then set the notes aside. Guidance on how to make an article from such notes will be provided separately.

1.7 WINDING UP

If the matter of the interview is technical, or if it is sensitive for some other reason that is important to the interviewee, offer to send him a draft which he can check for accuracy.

1.8 HINTS ON FOLLOW-UP

If you have promised a draft to the interviewee, make sure that he gets it and the draft is not lost in the despatch section of your office. When he responds, you will often be surprised at how much your writing can be improved by little touches he puts in here or there. However, if you have done your job carefully, he will have little to object to. If you have a difficult interviewee, who insists on rewriting the whole draft, see if he has a major point which you have ignored. If so, sit down and rework your piece. If this is not the case and he is simply being fussy, apologize pleasantly for wasting his time, forget about the interview, and hope for better luck with your next interviewee.

1.9 SUMMING UP

These are, as we said, only a few preliminaries to getting started with popular writing based on interviews. Because one is always interested in other human beings, interviews will always prove to be very rewarding. You will notice that magazine articles, for instance, are full of what other people are saying, learning, thinking, or doing. Such information is obtained only by talking to the people around you. That is why you should become skilled in talking to people, in asking the right questions and in listening to the many things people have to say. What you discover may merely inform or educate you, or it may amuse or amaze you that people can be so funny, strange, and sometimes shocking. If you teach yourself to get involved and listen to such people, and tell about what you have learnt so as to grip the attention of the reader, you will find your life as a writer seldom dull. How many vocations can make you that promise?

Activity 3

- i) List five persons who might make good interview subjects for you. Write a statement of 50 words (in all) explaining why each person has been chosen and the subject on which you will interview him.
- ii) Imagine you are interviewing one of them. What preparation are you going to make to get ready for the interview? (50 words)

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1.10 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

- i) Interviews can be used for (a) making reports, features, documentary stories more interesting and authentic; (b) drawing profiles of communities, groups, individuals (prominent personalities/ordinary persons), institutions; (c) throwing light on socio-political problems; and (d) obtaining from experts information and insights regarding special subjects.
- ii) Economists, industrialists, tradesmen, housewives. Can you think of others?

Activity 2

- i) Planning an interview (a) choice of suitable persons in accordance with the purpose of a interview; (b) gathering some information about the person to be interviewed and the subject to be discussed; (c) fixing an appointment/deciding how and where to meet a person/persons; (d) keeping questions ready after framing them carefully; (e) being punctual and suitably dressed. Conduct of an interview: (a) be relaxed, don't be overawed by an interviewee; (b) get to the interviewer's wave-length; (c) be tactful and flexible; (d) be ready to improvise according to the situation; (e) remember that the first few minutes of an interview are crucial; (f) don't air your own views and keep the interview moving.
- ii) Re-read section 1.3.2

Activity 3

Re-read section 1.4.1 before attempting the activity.

1.11 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit

Documentary story: story (i.e. writing, article) based on and presenting facts

Feature: a special long article in a newspaper

Media: pl. of 'medium', now used for newspapers, T.V. and Radio

Profile: aspect, appearance, sketch, short description, esp. of a person's life and character, as given in newspaper or on T.V.—hence personality profile

Saturation reporting: a form of reporting in which an issue, problem, etc. is covered from all possible angles

UNIT 2 PREPARING QUESTIONS

Structure

- 2.0 Aims and Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Write down your questions
 - 2.2.1 In advance
 - 2.2.2 In a logical order
- 2.3 Points to remember when framing questions
 - 2.3.1 Avoid questions which may draw yes/no answers
 - 2.3.2 Do not let your questions show bias
 - 2.3.3 Have a focus for your questions
 - 2.3.4 How a focus is determined
- 2.4 Basic questions of an interviewer
- 2.5 Technique of asking questions
 - 2.5.1 Be flexible in asking questions
 - 2.5.2 Ask supplementary questions
 - 2.5.3 Be ready to ask follow-up questions
 - 2.5.4 Try not to forget the obvious
- 2.6 Points to remember when the interview is in progress
 - 2.6.1 Make the interview run smoothly
 - 2.6.2 Listen carefully
 - 2.6.3 Watch the reactions of the interviewee
 - 2.6.4 Keep your interviewee in good humour
- 2.7 Handling of some special interview situations
 - 2.7.1 How to overcome resistance
 - 2.7.2 How to handle an evasive interviewee
 - 2.7.3 Interviewing a celebrity
 - 2.7.4 Interviewing more than one person
- 2.8 Summing up
- 2.9 Activities: aids to answers
- 2.10 Glossary

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to give you ideas on

- how to formulate questions for an interview;
- basic questions to be asked;
- the technique to be adopted in asking questions;
- the handling of certain types of interviewees; and
- the writing of an intelligent report.

After reading this Unit, you should be able to

- prepare a suitable list of questions to ask at a particular interview;
- avoid personal bias in formulating questions;
- focus your interview on the central theme;
- be flexible in asking questions;
- apply certain basic rules in pursuing a fruitful line of questioning;
- identify different types of interviewees;
- keep the interview running smoothly;
- know the interviewee's intentions;
- overcome the interviewee's resistance, if any; and finally
- write an intelligent but self-effacing report.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In your previous Unit, you learnt how to work out your preliminaries. You should now be able to get yourself ready to formulate your questions. Preparing questions beforehand with care is crucial to getting good results from an interview. The ability to improvise during the interview is important, and may often bring you startling results. However, it will not do to rely solely on that ability because you should not assume that you will be able to keep one step ahead of your interviewee.

2.2 WRITE DOWN YOUR QUESTIONS

It is always helpful to write down your questions.

2.2.1 In advance

Write down your questions in advance, giving them as much thought as you can, and phrase each question with care. Formulate your questions so that they will elicit the kind of responses you want whether it is information, opinion, attitude, or personality glimpses that you are after. Routine questions bring routine answers, while searching questions can draw out thoughtful responses and unusual questions can lead to surprising or meaningful insights.

2.2.2 In a logical order

Always jot down your questions in the order in which you wish to ask them. Give yourself plenty of room between questions. Not only will this help you add supplementary questions, but it will also help you to relocate the next question if you change your sequence in mid-interview.

2.3 POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN FRAMING QUESTIONS

Here are a few points to keep in mind when framing questions. Use them as a checklist.

2.3.1 Avoid questions which may draw yes/no answers

Never phrase the question in such a manner that the interviewee can dismiss it with a simple 'yes' or 'no', unless you are definitely trying, for example, to get an evasive public official to admit or deny something.

2.3.2 Do not let your questions show bias

As far as possible avoid words that reflect your own bias, unless you are deliberately using that as a strategy to provoke and open up a tough interviewee who is being difficult and evasive.

2.3.3 Have a focus for your questions

First, choose a focus or a particular objective for your interview. You may interview someone (a) to obtain information, (b) to know his views on a particular subject, and (c) to get to know him as a person, so that you can write a personality profile. Quite often, while you focus on one aspect, you will discover information that can be used in other ways to enrich your subject. But if you do not have a specific focus in mind, your questions will tend to range so widely that the responses will turn out to be a shapeless jumble, difficult to arrange into a meaningful shape. You can seldom anticipate all that you might discover, but your focus, once determined, will guide the shaping and ordering of your interview.

2.3.4 How a focus is determined

The person you have chosen to interview, as well as your reasons for choosing him, will tell you how you should proceed. If he is the survivor of a communal riot or a damaged plane, you will focus on his recollections and emotions related to the event itself. If he is an authority on some specific subject, the expertise or ideas will provide the focus. And if you are interviewing an actor, a sports star, a mountain climber, or a voluntary social worker, you look for aspects that can highlight the personality or the spirit of adventure or dedication of the interviewee. This primary focus will help you set a direction to the interview, but it should not prevent the exploration of secondary, related factors that can lend depth to your primary focus.

2.4 BASIC QUESTIONS OF AN INTERVIEWER

There is much virtue in the simplest questions that reporters learn to ask whenever they pursue even the most basic news story. Rudyard Kipling lists these questions in a brief and memorable stanza:

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who

Reporters call them the five Ws and H and seldom fail to keep track of them in whatever they write. The simplicity of this approach is sometimes ridiculed, but even its critics will not deny the sound common sense on which it is rooted.

These questions, then, will always suggest the basic leads that you can pursue. Pursue them relentlessly, taking care to apply them appropriately to your subject.

Betsy P. Graham, an eminent journalist, provides an excellent summary of how these might be applied:

Three questions should be posed frequently no matter what the occasion: 'Why?' 'How?' and 'For example?' When interviewing for a personality profile, try to find out why the person acts as he does, bearing in mind that the subject's past explains his present. Ask about the important influences in his life, how he spends a typical day, how he would like to be remembered, what he values most in life. If he says he's dissatisfied with his accomplishments, ask for an example of something he has failed to achieve. Ask him to describe the kind of people he is drawn to, to count the number of intimate friends he has. Ask him about the crises in his life, his disillusionments, his problems, his worst fault. Find out how he is trying to solve his problems or correct his weaknesses. Is there anything about himself that puzzles him?

Look for contradictions, irony: If he is a blabbermouth, does he criticise his wife for talking too much? Ask factual questions: Who, what, where, when, why, and how? Ask how many, how often, how much? Don't ask a professor if she enjoys teaching or finds it rewarding. Ask her (perhaps by a series of questions) how many students she has taught in her career, how many of them have become famous or very successful, how many write to her occasionally, and how many have become friends. Seek to convert the general answer into a concrete revelation. Frequently ask your subject to elaborate, to illustrate, to say it in simpler words.

When interviewing authorities, experts, and celebrities, turn your mind inside out to think of original questions. Ruthlessly shun those that readily occur to you, for you may be sure they've been asked hundreds of times before. Surprise a famous actress with a question about a little-known phase of her life, and you will be much more likely to get a fresh story with colourful quotes.

While preparing for the interview, think of ways to get good anecdotes—short illustrative stories that can pick up the tempo of a sluggish article. Those you already know from reading about the subject might be too familiar to use again, but ask his wife or his children to tell you fresh anecdotes about him. And look for experiences or situations in his life that will elicit anecdotes if

you ask the right questions. Sometimes you may especially want an anecdote told in the subject's own words rather than second-hand from a family member or a business associate. In that case you can simply ask him, for example, to tell you about the time he was almost killed in a hunting accident.

2.5 TECHNIQUE OF ASKING QUESTIONS

While your interviewee should get the impression that you are asking questions in a relaxed manner, even this is a contrived effect.

2.5.1 Be flexible in asking questions

A certain amount of flexibility both in framing and asking questions is necessary. Even with a cooperative interviewee, if you have phrased your questions so that you can elicit the information you expect, but have kept them flexible enough to allow him a relatively free play on his ideas, you can still use the list to stay on course. Where the person is shy or reticent, further questioning on a friendly, informal note, or trading an experience similar to the one you expect him to communicate to you, might help. Your advance list can help you choose something that he responds to. And if he is deliberately digressing, you can politely bring him back to the subject, without getting lost in his diversions.

2.5.2 Ask supplementary questions

Perhaps you won't need to follow your list of questions beyond a point. Perhaps better questions will occur to you as the interviewee warms up and leads you off in a new direction. It would be unwise not to listen carefully and follow his leads. But, on the contrary, you can run into a person who is shy and not all that cooperative. Or you may run into a crafty person who deliberately ignores your questions and rambles on.

2.5.3 Be ready to ask follow-up questions

When you observe such reactions, follow up with apt questions—'Do you feel comfortable about that assumption?' or 'Do you really think so? Why?' or 'Can you tell me a little more about how you feel about this?' or 'Are you saying, then, that...?' or 'Let's take the opposite view for a moment...?' How you size up the interviewee's emotions will govern where you lead him.

2.5.4 Try not to forget the obvious

In all your preparation and conversation with the interviewee, you may ignore the most obvious question. After a long press conference, the astronauts who walked on the moon were exposed to a school child who asked them: 'Were you scared?', a question that all the trained reporters had overlooked.

Activity 1

What is the technique that can be usefully adopted in asking questions? (100 words)

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(Check your answers with the hints given at the end of the Unit)

2.6 POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN THE INTERVIEW IS IN PROGRESS

Even when you have made all the preparations, done all your homework and finally made it to the interview, you should not become lax.

2.6.1 Make the interview run smoothly

Once you have opened up the flow of conversation, keep it going. You need to listen carefully throughout, with your mind alert. If the person rambles or strays too far from the subject, interrupt him discreetly and purposefully to indicate the direction in which you want the talk to proceed. Never forget that your role is that of a discerning listener. You are not the expert, but you have a responsibility to the reader. For instance, if you are interviewing an expert on a current problem and he strays too far into background, you might come back with 'That sounds interesting. But are you saying it relates to the present?' And if he says, 'yes', interject quickly, 'in what way?' That should help. If it doesn't, keep trying other ploys, until something works. If the question is controversial and the interviewee is evasive, try summarizing the opposite point of view in a brief statement and tell him you want his side so that you can balance the picture in your mind. Something, somewhere along those lines, will work.

2.6.2 Listen carefully

The art of listening requires more than close attention to what is being said. You may need to look beyond the words the interviewee speaks. You must catch his hidden feelings, his unexpressed reactions. Watching him and reading his thoughts are thus as important as hearing his words and being able to read your notes.

2.6.3 Watch the reactions of the interviewee

The nod of his head, his smile or frown, the twitching of his brow, the perspiration on his face, or his assured, confident air will tell you how to evaluate his mood, as well as what he is saying.

2.6.4 Keep your interviewee in good humour

Whatever you do or ask, you should know how to keep the person you are interviewing in good humour. Keep him relaxed, and draw the person out so that what you get out of him makes a good article.

2.7 HANDLING OF SOME SPECIAL INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

Sometimes you may find yourself in a situation where problems of a special nature arise, unexpectedly.

2.7.1 How to overcome resistance

You may encounter resistance of varying degree or kind, before or during an interview. It may help to know a few instances, and to consider how such resistance can be overcome.

Hugh Sherwood once arrived to interview a top public official, a list of 32 questions in hand. The VIP's public relations men asked to see the questions and ruled out twenty-seven as beyond the official's field. Sherwood was disheartened, but he decided to take the chance. After a few minutes of conversation with the official, seeing that he was a courteous person, Sherwood told him: 'Your public information officer says you can answer hardly any of my questions. He doesn't seem to think you know much.' The PRO was annoyed, but not the official, who went on to give Sherwood a big scoop for which he had not come prepared, but which was very welcome indeed. He had to change his line of questioning considerably, but it rewarded him amply. The implicit challenge to the official's status made him talk frankly.

2.7.2 How to handle an evasive interviewee

If, during an interview, a public official tries to stop you with responses such as 'No comment', or 'I'd rather not answer that', and if you know that he knows more and it is in the public interest to bring that out, you need to keep trying. This can take several forms. You can plead helplessness and say your article won't see print unless the question is answered. Or you can point out that his refusal to answer may lead to rumour and speculation, with damaging effects. Or you may threaten to obtain the information from other sources. How far you succeed will depend partly on your stature, partly on a range of circumstances.

2.7.3 Interviewing a celebrity

If it is a prominent person you are interviewing, what you have read about him, or learned from conversations with people who know him, will give you cues both on where to start and how to proceed. If something he has written or said is the central issue, you should study it carefully in advance and break it down into its component parts. You can choose an aspect to begin with; this can then be related to the other issues in a logical fashion.

2.7.4 Interviewing more than one person

Sometimes it would be necessary for you to interview more than one person. When the occasion demands it, let the interviewee know about it, so he knows what to expect. Two factors can help you in the decision. First, is the person so important or interesting that his opinions or his personality will give you enough material to support a substantial story? Second, is the subject so large or so controversial that you need to reflect different approaches? If so, one person cannot be expected to provide all that you need.

2.8 SUMMING UP

Asking questions, then, is more than a matter of ready wit. It takes much advance care and preparation, courtesy and sympathy for other human beings, the ability to catch nuances, to hold one's own against an aggressive official, and to relate to another person in an open, free manner. You need to work hard, to let the other person feel that you are decent, sincere, and knowledgeable. But when it comes to the reader, play down your own role, except to apply your intelligence towards lending coherence and shape to the material you have gathered. If you can also avoid the temptation to put your feelings above those of persons you have interviewed and their opinions and feelings, you will be doing more effectively what the reader expects you to do, providing a communication link between the subject and your reader. You will thus be doing the reader a service, while enjoying yourself. It takes a lot of effort and skill, but you derive much satisfaction at the end of the process.

Activity 2

Choose some person and theme for your interview and draw up a list of five questions, following the guidelines offered in this Unit. (80 words)

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit)

2.9 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- a) be flexible both in framing and asking questions;
- b) be ready to ask supplementary questions, and questions improvised to suit a situation;
- c) ask follow-up questions to arrive at definite positions; and
- d) don't forget to ask the obvious questions.

Activity 2

Hints:

The choice is wide: politician, scientist, artist, cricketer and so on. If you choose a cricketer your questions can be about (a) cricket in India, (b) international cricket. You could ask questions on: (a) relative strengths of the teams now playing, (b) top batsmen and bowlers, (c) importance of fielding, (d) influence of one day matches and playing techniques, (e) selection boards, (f) training, (g) discovering fresh talent etc., etc.

2.10 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the terms used in this Unit.

Anecdote: a short interesting or amusing story about a person or incident

Nuance: subtle shade of colour, meaning; originally used in painting and carpet weaving when colours meet to produce a new shade

UNIT 3 USE OF INTERVIEW EQUIPMENT—AUDIO, VIDEO, PHOTOGRAPHS, EXTRACTS

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Electronic aids in interviewing
- 3.3 Audio cassettes/tape recorders
 - 3.3.1 Disadvantages of electronic tools
 - 3.3.2 How to use a tape recorder: necessary precautions
- 3.4 Making do without tapes/cassettes
- 3.5 Using video cassettes: advantages
 - 3.5.1 Disadvantages of video equipment
 - 3.5.2 Handling a video
 - 3.5.3 Making do without video
- 3.6 The use of photographs
- 3.7 Using extracts
- 3.8 Summing up
- 3.9 Activities: aids to answers
- 3.10 Glossary

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit aims at providing necessary and basic information about

- the use of electronic aids in interviewing;
- the advantages and disadvantages in the use of such aids; and
- the use that can be made of photographs and extracts in interview reports and articles.

After reading this Unit, you should be able to

- appreciate what radio and television can do in presenting an interview, which a printed version cannot normally do;
- think of ways in which to meet this competition—
 - a) by using audio and video cassettes, where possible, after learning how to use them; and
 - b) by learning to adjust your interviewing and writing techniques to meet the competition from the newer media, even if you are not using their tools;
- plan how to use photographs or line illustrations to enrich your presentation;
- be acquainted with the kinds of extracts that can be used to supplement interview articles, and learn to use them; and
- develop interviewing techniques for a range of subjects and demands, calling upon technological and other aids as appropriate.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding two Units, you learnt about the many uses of interviews for professional writers and about the ways in which the writer prepares himself for the task of interviewing. Here we will talk about some equipment or tools that can aid the writer in this task. Note especially that each tool has its potential uses as well as limitations. No matter how sophisticated the equipment at one's disposal, there is, finally, no substitute for the writer's human skills.

Some 20 or 30 years ago, the writer's task was simple. He could make do with pen or pencil and paper, as discussed. Today other means are available and they can be used.

3.2 ELECTRONIC AIDS IN INTERVIEWING

Think of the last time you listened to a gripping interview on radio or watched one on television. If you pause and consider, you may well find qualities in these interviews which might be missing from others you have read in print. The electronic media have added two pieces of equipment the writer has to contend with—the tape recorder and the video camera. We will discuss them, briefly, to consider both, how a writer might use them, and how he might adjust his interviewing and writing techniques to accommodate the competition from the newer media, even if he is not directly using their tools.

3.3 AUDIO CASSETTES/TAPE RECORDERS

Cassette recorders are a handy tool in reporting, much more in evidence today than they were even 15 or 20 years ago. They can record the words of the interviewee in full, reducing reliance upon the writer's memory and providing ready access for playback. They have revolutionized reporting of conventional kinds. Take, for example, news conferences or interviews with public figures, where the scope for later denials or contradictions is considerably minimized. Recorders have also led to more ambitious forms of reportage,—oral history, or popular sociology—where the writer talks to witnesses or participants at length on historical events and then transcribes their responses, or brings out the perceptions of a chosen ethnic group, tribe, or professional class.

3.3.1 Disadvantages of electronic tools

While the potential is enormous, using tapes or audio cassettes also has several disadvantages. First is the expense, not always affordable, of the equipment itself. Second is the time involved in listening to entire stretches of conversation or in transcribing them for ease of reference. Third, the danger of equipment failure could totally defeat the purpose of using it. And fourth, often quite important, is the danger that the visibility of the equipment makes your subject self-conscious and totally on guard in what he is saying, unless he is used to it or has asked for it specifically.

You have to carefully weigh each of these factors before deciding to use a tape or cassette recorder. You will discover that to record a conversation that runs for an hour or longer, you need more than one tape, and the act of changing tapes could interrupt the interview and lead your subject off cue. Or you may find that after a 4-or-5-hour interview, you ultimately use only a few paragraphs of what the person actually said, while you have spent days either listening to it or transcribing it. And in summarizing the interviewee's words within your context, you may still lay yourself open to the charge of misinterpreting him or quoting him out of context, a result that again defeats one main purpose of using the tape in the first place.

You may also discover that in worrying about how to operate the machine during the interview, you are missing out on certain words or gestures that are key to your staying on top of your material.

3.3.2 How to use a tape recorder: necessary precautions

If you do need to use a tape, either for protecting yourself from later rebuttal, or for having a vast storehouse of material to tap in your final effort, observe the following precautions:

- a) **Make sure you know the equipment quite well. Do not go in with hastily borrowed equipment, expecting it to do the job. Test it out for yourself.**

- b) Obtain the consent of the interviewee to being recorded.
- c) Use a battery-operated recorder, and the smaller it is, the better. Cords and power connections can be quite a bother, especially when you do not know the place. Bulky equipment can add to discomfort all around, if you end up talking to someone in a crowded room or at a cluttered desk.
- d) Try and use the recorder only in instances where background noise is minimal or unobtrusive. Such noises get picked up and magnified and you may end up with a tape on which the words are hazy or indistinct.
- e) Make sure you have an adequate supply of tapes or cassettes to run the course and they are in good condition.
- f) Once you have switched on the equipment, take your mind off it. Concentrate on your subject, just as you would without the equipment. Also, take some notes, partly to focus your thoughts, partly to insure against equipment failure. The notes can also help you later to find what you want on the recorded tape with relative ease. Absence of such notes could cost hours. And your notes can be crucial in filling gaps. The tape recorder simply cannot help with gestures and facial expressions of the interviewee, for example.
- g) When under time pressure to write the article, use the recorder only to focus on nuances, on the particular idiom, tone of speech, or sentence structure used by the subject to convey a thought in his particular way.

3.4 MAKING DO WITHOUT TAPES/CASSETTES

Now that you have learnt the advantages of using a tape recorder, the next challenge is to try and incorporate its best elements, even when you are functioning without one. The chief merits of a tape recorder are: (1) its facility of recall; (2) its totality of record or perspective; and (3) its ability to capture nuances of speech, which makes an interview especially memorable. In doing without the aid of tape, you would do well to

- train your memory to concentrate so that recalling what was said becomes relatively easy;
- focus on the main points while listening or taking notes, so that the coherence or total perspective are not missed; and
- learn to write down in detail those words where the subject's nuances are best brought out.

Once you have learnt to do these things, you will do almost as well with or without the aid of tapes in many situations.

The use of tapes can be reserved, then, for occasions which specially demand their use and, on such occasions, the best use can be made of them. In short, if you use tapes sparingly and learn to use them well, there is little to lose and much to be gained.

3.5 USING VIDEO CASSETTES: ADVANTAGES

An extension of the audio-recording technology is portable video technology—available today to some of us, if not exactly within easy reach. When a video cassette is used, to the advantages of the recorded audio is added an image of the interviewee as he talks—his gestures and mannerisms intact. This is no mean advantage, regardless of what impression the interviewee makes. A politician may appear responsive and articulate, or callous, vacuous, and ill-informed; an artist may appear bright and exciting, or turn out to be a talking mime. The rapport established with the viewer is instant, and the image presented is both clearer and more firmly grasped. It gives the viewer a handy means of 'getting a grip' on the subject.

Video is an exciting new field that offers a lot to discover. But to retain our focus, we will limit this discussion to a few essentials of video presentation, and see it mainly in

terms of a writer using the video as a recording aid, with an occasional chance to share snippets with small groups. Camera angles, visual effects, editing of visuals, and other points of presentation will lie outside our present scope.

3.5.1 Disadvantages of video equipment

Some of the disadvantages mentioned for audio are even more pronounced for video. First is the near-prohibitive cost and difficulty of access. Second is the time involved in production and the equipment needed, not only to record but even to play back for reference. Third is the danger of inefficient handling and fourth, making the subject self-conscious. But none of these conditions is operative at all times. If you have access to video and your subject is willing to be recorded, there are things you can do, with possibly pleasing results.

3.5.2 Handling a video

- a) Learn to operate a video camera, or better still, take along someone who can do it while you talk to the interviewee. If you operate the camera yourself, you may end up with a subject talking to the camera, rather than to you, leading to a loss of spontaneity.
- b) Learn to keep the interview short, to make better use of expensive time and equipment.
- c) If you are recording yourself and asking questions, learn to keep them short. Keep your style chatty and conversational, so rapport is assured with both your subject and audience, if you should chance to use the footage with an audience.
- d) Learn to relax the interviewee before you shoot, so that you show him to advantage. Do not let equipment handling cause a poorer presentation of your subject than is otherwise warranted.
- e) Learn to use a video camera selectively, where you can anticipate that the responses would so represent the subject that other forms of recording cannot compete. If you are interviewing, for example, an Indian dancer on *abhinaya*, or a chef in his kitchen, the video can be used to advantage.

3.5.3 Making do without video

You find yourself in an unenviable position. You know what effects you can achieve with a video, if you had access. But access at present is simply out of the question. Never mind. The camera is only an instrument, albeit a powerful one, and you can train yourself to capture in your memory the images, gestures, tones, and words of the people you interview so that your prose can glow with the action that occurred outside the view of the camera. Your recording mind was there, and you can train it to do what video does for the less intelligent or industrious. Once again, the right kind of note-taking will help greatly.

Activity 1

- i) What are the advantages and disadvantages in the use of electronic aids at interviews? (100 words)
- ii) Considering the advantages and disadvantages of using electronic tools in interviews, for what purpose/purposes would you like to use them? (50 words)
- iii) When you watch your next TV interview, write a note on distinct points of the medium that occur to you. (50 words)
- iv) List six subjects where video can be especially helpful. (30 words)

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

3.6 THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

In focusing on the words and images evocative of the persons you are talking to, do not ignore the value of photographs. Newspapers and magazines need to use photographs, both to present their subjects more fully and to compete with the visual media. Depth of coverage is what the printed word can offer, but a good photo or selection of photographs can add value and perspective to your writing. Newspapers and magazines may often be willing to lend a photographer to help your effort, but you would do well to rely also on your own ability. Sometimes you may also be able to borrow a good photo from your subject or an archive, but you cannot rely on them always to solve your needs.

In addition to learning to handle a camera, you need to know a few basics that determine picture quality and selection. Most important is the content or suitability of the picture. Is it evocative of a mood or, in a series, of several moods? Does it illustrate the central point that you are trying to put across?

Then, a few technical points. Is the picture to be in black and white, or in colour? What size or format of negative or print is acceptable to the publication in view? If in colour, depth and sharpness of image, in terms of foreground and background, are to be considered. If in black and white, contrast is vital, meaning that areas that look clearly black or white must predominate over areas that look grey. If a series of photographs is used, their sequence is important. And accompanying captions should supplement what the pictures are about, not repeat the obvious.

Cartoons, sketches, and line drawings, too, can lend a special, personal touch, if you have the talent. Think of Abu Abraham or R.K. Laxman.

3.7 USING EXTRACTS

Extracts of many kinds can be used with interview articles: chronology or history, other perspectives or views on the theme, a select list of the man's views or works, quotations on his work from other authorities. They add a dimension of information or education, or may simply help charm the reader.

The kind of reading or research suggested in earlier Units would help you find this kind of information. What you choose to focus on will depend on your intentions in the rest of the article. Such information is often usefully presented as an illustration in itself. It can be arranged in the form of a box, panel, or sidebar to accompany the article. Observe the publication you are writing for, to choose your options. Showing awareness of such accessories can increase the sale value of your writing.

3.8 SUMMING UP

We have discussed the advantages of using audio and video equipment and noted the handicaps as well. We have also noted what human ingenuity and trained skills can do to meet the challenge posed by the newer media. The skills can be learned and there is scarcely a better way to get trained than to do it by yourself. Other accessories, such as photographs and extracts, can also embellish your efforts and aid better communication with your chosen readers. The tips offered here should help you along.

Activity 2

You are asked to interview any two of the following for a magazine article: (a) Melville de Mellow; (b) M.F Hussain; (c) Sonal Mansingh; and (d) P. V. Narasimha Rao. If these personalities are not familiar to you, do a similar exercise on any two celebrities with whom you are familiar. Given ideal conditions, what tools would you use for each of them? Justify each choice in about 60-100 words.

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3.9 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Advantages: (a) Reducing reliance on memory; (b) providing playback facility; (c) guarding against later contradiction or denial; (d) capturing nuances of speech/gestures and mannerisms of speaker (video cassette); (e) capturing images, atmosphere (video).

- Disadvantages; (a) High cost; (b) possibility of equipment failure; (c) making interviewer self-conscious; (d) interruption caused by having to change tapes in a long interview; (e) long time needed in transcribing taped words; (f) distraction caused by worrying about how to operate the device, hence losing sight of the focus of an interview; (g) time spent on production (video).
- ii) We would use the devices sparingly and unobtrusively to: (a) help our memory; (b) check our impressions of an interviewee and his words; (c) go back to what occurred during the interview in order to look for nuances of words and gestures; (d) preserve an exact record to turn back to, whenever needed, in future.
- iii) You may note specially: (a) striking features in the setting; (b) gestures and expressions of the person interviewed (hesitant or open, confident or uncertain, pleasant or otherwise, etc.)
- iv) For example: an outdoor interview; an interview with a dancer/painter; interview in a handicrafts shop; pottery; ceramics; etc. Think up other subjects.

Activity 2

Consider for which of the persons named you would use a tape recorder/video cassette/ordinary camera. With which of them would you concentrate more on taking notes and marshalling your questions?

3.10 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a list of the terms used in the Unit.

Format: general plan or arrangement

Reportage: the art of reporting nuance; see glossary for Unit 2

UNIT 4 EDITING AND ORGANISATION

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Some essentials recalled
- 4.3 Giving shape to interview material
 - 4.3.1 Importance of focus, lead, and structure
 - 4.3.2 Anecdotes: how to handle and use them
 - 4.3.3 Quotations vs. paraphrasing
 - 4.3.4 What quotes to use and how
 - 4.3.5 Importance of balance in the article as a whole
- 4.4 Revision and rewriting
- 4.5 Question-and-answer format
- 4.6 Summing up
- 4.7 Activities: aids to answers

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to give you guidance on how to

- organize the material, resulting from an interview, into an ordered and balanced piece of writing by making intelligent use of a process of selection and rejection;
- give your article a proper focus and lead, always keeping your eye trained on what is likely to appeal to the reader you are writing for;
- make your writing lively and authentic by making an effective and judicious use of anecdotes and quotations.

After reading this Unit, you should be able to

- a) sift through the wealth of material you have gathered;
- b) make an informed and intelligent selection of what to present in the article from all that material;
- c) apply your shaping imagination to decide on focus, lead, and structure;
- d) make selective and dramatic use of anecdotes;
- e) decide when to use quotations and when to paraphrase;
- f) observe due caution in using the question-and-answer format;
- g) maintain balance in your overall presentation and establish your credibility and integrity as a writer in control of his material; and
- h) write an interesting piece that grips the reader through the **selection and arrangement** of your material.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

You are now at a stage where you have successfully negotiated several problems that beset an interviewer. You have learnt how to choose a subject/subjects for your interviews. You have learnt what to focus on in formulating your questions, and how to keep an interview on course, running it smoothly amidst unsuspected byways that you may encounter. You have learnt about the kind of reading and research that can help you before and during the interview, aided, where called upon, by your own resourcefulness, tact and humour. You have also learnt about various ways to keep track of what is being said, and about ways to embellish what you have gathered.

In this Unit, we will build on what you have already learnt, and focus on one important aspect of interview articles—how to edit and organize your material and how to shape it into a coherent form that will grip your reader. In other words, we will talk about aspects of selective presentation, which alone can result in a finished product that accords with your intentions. In doing so, we will not consciously dwell upon fundamentals that have already been dealt with in earlier parts of this course: accuracy and simplicity, directness, authenticity and credibility, authorial voice, methods of narration, and readability. We will focus, instead, on what is specific to presenting interview articles.

4.2 SOME ESSENTIALS RECALLED

Let us begin by recalling some essentials from our previous Units. We learnt, for instance, that interviewing consists of learning what interests people, and then asking questions so that we elicit answers about what is most interesting or vivid in their lives. We learnt also about the importance of recording their responses so that our writing can draw upon a full reservoir of information and insights.

Yet another essential we noted was forming a clear idea of the kind of reader we are writing for, and the kind of publication that will help us reach him. Now comes the task of converting all those assorted records and notes into a piece of meaningful communication with the reader.

4.3 GIVING SHAPE TO INTERVIEW MATERIAL

With all your notes, references, and quotations in hand, you might find before you a shapeless jumble. How now to distill its essence? Take heart. There is not a writer alive who has not had to face this problem. And the harder you have worked on the interview, the more frustrating you may find this task of shaping. Patience is called for at this stage; you need to persevere, and you may well find your foresight and planning more and more helpful as you go along.

Even if you have all the needed material on hand, you can write the article only when you have

- **thought about** your material carefully to the point of **thinking through it**, noting down possible treatments as exhaustively as you can;
- studied possible market outlets carefully;
- identified your readers and decided what **slant** is needed to both **attract** and **sustain** their interest;
- decided on an appropriate tone, length, and style for your article; and
- planned photos and other illustrations.

In sum, a well-written interview article, while it may sound fresh and spontaneous, is the result of much labour. It flows from your careful thinking and planning of each aspect mentioned here.

In writing the article, keep your intended reader constantly in mind. He will guide your selection of material, help set your tone, and provide **shape, order, and coherence** for your piece. As Journalism Professor Betsy P. Graham puts it, 'to convert what may have been a disjointed oral romp into a coherent portrait or feature is your task'.

4.3.1 Importance of focus, lead, and structure

Your shaping imagination will have to be put to work in organizing your material. Three inter-related factors are important in this respect: (a) what you have chosen to focus on, (b) how you choose to lead or start, and (c) how you structure your piece.

As we have already spent considerable time talking about focus, it will suffice here to point out that having thought through your material, your focus will help you organize your final presentation. Your focus, in turn, will be expressed in two specific items: (a) your lead, opening, or introduction, and (b) the overall structure, which will be governed by the logic of your presentation.

Leads or openings can be of several kinds and have been discussed earlier. Your task now is to find a lead appropriate to your subject and one that seems to have the best potential appeal to readers, given the material you have on hand. Do you wish to startle or surprise or shock the reader? Do you wish to lead him in gently? Do you wish to start with a persuasive idea, or even a controversial one? Do you want to let a set of contradictory facts form the backdrop or opening against which you will launch your piece? Or do you want to introduce the interviewed person himself?

If so, will it be through a significant or startling quotation or through some observation you have made about his appearance and manners? These and several other possibilities may occur to you, and you will have to choose the one most appropriate for your material. With experience, you will learn to arrive at your solution fairly quickly—develop the instinct, so to say, of deciding what will come off best—but to start with, you may have to experiment with drafts of several different openings until you hit upon the best solution.

This exercise of thinking carefully and then experimenting with leads will also provide you with a logic to arrange the rest of your presentation. Once you have chosen your dominant element, other elements will fall into place, step by step. But it will not happen automatically. You will still have to don your thinking cap as you decide on how the different points, quotes, or arguments in your piece are to be strung together. What supports or complements the point you have made already? What departs from it and sets up a counterpoint or argument? How will this be resolved? How varied or uniform do you want your treatment to be? And to what overall purpose? Thinking through and negotiating these processes will give you the overall structure of your piece. Again, there are no short cuts. With careful thinking, wide reading, and experience, you will develop an 'instinct' or 'feel' for doing this more easily.

4.3.2 Anecdotes: how to handle and use them

Anecdotes form the backbone of people-oriented writing. We have discussed earlier how you can probe a subject after having established a rapport. But even assuming that your subject offers you promising material, anecdotes do not always write themselves. You have to write them in a way that does the job you intend of them within your context, while keeping your reader rivetted to the piece.

Practise writing down all anecdotal material that occurs to you in observations around you. Then try shaping them into brief, credible, memorable anecdotes. You can use *The Readers' Digest* as a reference for comparing your efforts with published, readable material. This kind of practice will help you both to identify anecdotal material in your interviews, and to shape them into usable form.

Remember, anecdotes are such a rich mine because they illustrate what people have done or accomplished or felt at given moments, or why they failed to accomplish what they set themselves to do. Anecdotes offer meaty evidence for any generalizations and inferences you may offer. And since they read so well, your own argument or abstraction becomes that much more palatable or acceptable.

4.3.3 Quotations vs. paraphrasing

One major problem in interview articles is deciding when to quote and when to paraphrase the interviewee. The decision will have to be based on a number of factors. Important among them are your skills as a writer, the subject's skills in conveying things in an exclusive or interesting way, and what would most suit your target audience or readership. A balance has to be found among these factors.

If you have closely followed the advice offered in earlier Units some of your problems at this stage would already have taken care of themselves. If you have listened carefully during your interviews, taken down verbatim only what is significant, and filled up gaps in your notes soon afterwards, when the words and ideas discussed were still fresh in your mind, some of what you should quote and summarize would already be clear.

But further thinking and a selection are involved at the stage of writing the article. Your first duty is to the reader, to keep him interested and tell him what is significant in as few words as is possible. Few people talk interestingly for long, however articulate or accomplished they might otherwise be. You owe it to the reader to cut out what seems trivial, to intervene and make flat, outright summaries wherever necessary, but also to preserve what is peculiar to the subject or person you are interviewing.

4.3.4 What quotes to use and how

In general, try to quote verbatim astonishing or controversial statements, no matter how they are worded. For instance, Hollywood actress, Ava Gardner, once said to an interviewer, 'You do drink—right, baby?' And it would have been a distortion to render it in any other way. And if your subject is explaining highly technical terms, **use his words**, not yours. When he gets too abstract, dense, or diffuse, you paraphrase him for the reader, but retain enough of quotes to convey the interviewee's special knowledge of flavour, without sacrificing readability.

If you quote a person for several paragraphs at a stretch, it becomes monotonous. You have to quote, yes, but you have to break up a person's statements with your own comments, connections or transitions, without appearing intrusive. You may find in reviewing your notes or transcripts, for instance, that something a person said on page 2 ties up very nicely with some other thing he said on page 7. It is your job to string them together, as long as you stay faithful to the intentions of the person interviewed. Subjects are often pleased at what emerges from such creative editing.

You need to choose between dozens or hundreds of statements made by an interviewee, and you should delete digressions and wordiness. People seldom speak in perfectly structured sentences; gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and stress often punctuate what is being said. Your job is to weave in all that you observe and to report, without distortion, what you understand to be the intent of the speaker. Truth is never absolute, and it can only be approached by such a process of selection and accretion.

Activity 1

Each part of this Activity should be done in 60-70 words.

- i) What does focusing an article mean? What are the various possible leads one can choose for a piece?
- ii) Study an interview article of your choice to determine (a) what does it focus on: (b) what kind of opening does it have and how effective do you think it is, and why?
- iii) How can the use of anecdotes and quotations make an article lively and authentic?
- iv) Take an interesting article, find the anecdotes and/or quotations in it and say what role do they play.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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4.3.5 Importance of balance in the article as a whole

We just learnt about maintaining a balance between quotes and paraphrasing and about retaining control of the article at all times. This is true not merely of quotes but, by extension, of the article as a whole.

To keep your credibility intact with the reader, you need to maintain a balance of treatment and also to ensure that your integrity as a writer is not open to question. In the modern era of image-building and PR men, this is specially important. See if your story sounds too one-sided. If it is a thematic interview, see that the views are not too predictable and simple. If you are presenting a personality, take care that you are not being too adulatory or critical. If this happens, you will need to redress that balance. You may need to interview again, or you may simply need to tone down and re-edit your material.

Evaluation and refining of material

The key to this entire process is evaluation. You have to evaluate your material all the time, both in relation to what you know to be true and in relation to the expectations of your reader for a full picture of what is being presented. You may start with a tentative hypothesis, but you find the need to change it (i) as you interview, (ii) as you review your material, and (iii) as you write it up for the reader. Only constant evaluation on all counts can ensure that your selected material is of the requisite quality. And if in the process, some of what you gathered gets rejected, so be it. You are now in the refining process, sifting grain from chaff.

Then comes packaging and marketing. And since you are not merely selling a product, but your name and reputation alongside it, concern for your integrity enters the picture as well. You want to sell this article, yes, but you also want to become a respected professional. You cannot do that by being short-sighted about your goals.

A further part of this refining for credibility and integrity is learning to take your own obvious biases out. Let the subject you are interviewing come through **fairly** to the reader. Let the reader judge for himself. You merely act as a link, speeding up communication between subject and reader. But that communication does not occur in a vacuum. It can only take place when a meeting-ground is established, and your intelligence helps shape that fortuitous meeting place.

4.4 REVISION AND REWRITING

All along the editing and writing process several revaluations may be necessary and several drafts may be called for. No matter how carefully you have planned, there is nothing to be ashamed about if the first or second draft doesn't sound quite right. As

accomplished a writer as John Galbraith, in a preface to his fourth book, talks of the look of spontaneity that enters his writing when he reaches the fourth or fifth draft stage. That shows how hard a business writing often is.

Do not be afraid to pursue several leads and to experiment. But be ruthless when it comes to deciding what works best amongst the possible approaches. And when you have selected your approach, be equally ruthless in pruning the draft down to essentials. This is hard to do, but needs to be done.

In fact, writing often means rewriting. In rewriting or pruning your efforts, it is a good idea to keep your reader constantly in mind, and choose among words and ways of expressing what is most appropriate for him. Also, read the draft aloud to yourself to look for ways to improve it. What sounds better will often be the better way to put it across. Or let a friend or friends read your draft and guide you with their comments, while you retain your judgement on what changes you wish to accept.

4.5 QUESTION-AND-ANSWER FORMAT

One variant of the interview article format is the question-and-answer (Q & A) presentation. It is still in vogue, though not as common as it used to be. The reason why its popularity has diminished is that it denies the writer the freedom to weave in background and set the context for quotes. But even in using the Q & A format, you would do well to select and condense the interviewee's words or to rephrase your questions for sharper focus, as long as the meaning is retained. Desist from using the Q & A format as a lazy way out of editorial labour.

4.6 SUMMING UP

As you have learnt in the previous Units, a good interview is the result of investigating your subject from several angles, formulating provocative questions, using electronic devices unobtrusively to record it, above all, handling your interviewee with tact and humour.

Having such a wealth of material at hand, the real task is to edit and organise it to give it coherence and fluency.

- To recall, know the interests of your interviewee and record fully his responses.
- Know your target audience and the publication in which your interview will appear.
- Awareness of your intended reader will help set your tone and provide *shape, order* and coherence to your piece.
- You must know what to focus on and think out your over-all structure for the interview and its introduction.
- You should use interesting anecdotes to hold the interest of your readers.
- When quoting, you must select from a speech or dialogue, those portions peculiar to the person you are interviewing and paraphrase the uninteresting or flat portions.
- You need to give balanced treatment to your subject so that your integrity as an interviewer is not questioned.
- Revise and rewrite, each time striking out irrelevant matter. Welcome critical appraisal of your work.

Activity 2

- i) Write two openings for an interview article on an artist (novelist/painter/actor/film director). Let one opening have a lead towards the personality of the artist, the other towards his or her art (100-120 words each).
- ii) Read the attached article on Woody Allen's film editor. Virtually all that is said of the film editor there is equally valid for a writer who is reshaping his material from voluminous notes.

Write a critical annotation, in 100-120 words, covering the following:

- a) How many people did the writer possibly talk to?

The Woman Who Restructures Woody

She's the one who lets Woody Allen be Woody. Susan E. Morse is the name on the credits. She goes by Sandy. She's tall, given to sheepish seventh-grader smiles, and has edited everything from *Manhattan* to *Radio Days*.

She took over as Allen's editor from Ralph Rosenblum, who left to make his own films and to write. At 34, she has had an Oscar nomination for *Hannah and Her Sisters*. (although Claire Simpson took the award for *Platoon*).

Morse, dressed nouvelle brunch in red sweater and flannel slacks, talks about working for one of the United States's most popular living directors.

So what's it like to edit Allen? 'It's not unlike a marriage. You're working for the same thing, and you're both aware early of the other's flaws. It's very interesting. You're both concerned with the end result. The key thing is honesty.'

Part of that honesty is a cold-eyed detachment toward the material. 'Your natural impulse is to dismiss everything that works. You immediately neglect what is good.'

'You have to force yourself to talk about the good stuff more. It can be devastating to see someone not laughing at all your jokes. Although with Woody, you don't have to be as tactful as you do with others. He's more secure in himself.'

Allen takes sobering news very well, she says. 'He isn't married to the material in the sense some directors are.' In fact, many of his films have been radically restructured in the editing room.

You wouldn't know what the editor does by reading the average film review or even by seeing the average film.

But Morse gets gratification enough when colleagues recognise her work, she says. She hesitates to single out her contributions to Allen's pictures. 'It's sort of like team sports,' she says. 'It doesn't matter who passes the ball, whether so and so gets an assist, or who gets the goal. You just want to come up with the best end result.'

What the editor does is transform thousands of feet of film and sound tape—sometimes up to 40 hours—into about 90 minutes of intercut image and sound. Consecutive 16-hour days can be spent pondering whether a sound effect precedes or accompanies a shot, whether a reaction shot helps or harms a scene, whether the second take is better than the 22nd.

Hard choices occur at every turn, all in the name of moving the story forward. This means junking the director's shots and scenes by the score. Morse remembers the chore of cutting a friend's performance completely out of *Arthur*. The weary cliché 'left on the cutting-room floor' is, for her, a daily consideration.

Morse learned her techniques mostly at Rosenblum's elbow. After a liberal-arts degree at Yale, her interest in making films was piqued while she observed BBC and ITV productions in London.

She enrolled at New York University's film school and in fall of 1975, answered a bulletin-board ad for editorial help on *A Secret Space*, a film for a public-television dramatic series. She was then recommended to Rosenblum, who was cutting another film for PBS, originally titled 'Remember Those Poker-Playing Mondays'.

Rosenblum asked her to work on *Annie Hall* the following year. 'I had the choice of paying for a film education or being paid for one,' Morse says. She dropped out of NYU, and they worked together on that and *Interiors*.

When Rosenblum accepted an offer to direct a film, there was a job open on Allen's upcoming **Manhattan**.

'I think Sandy was timid about calling him and asking,' Rosenblum says. 'I encouraged her to call him. And she's been there ever since.'

Morse took **Manhattan**. And **A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy**, **Zelig**, **Broadway**, **Danny Rose**, **The Purple Rose of Cairo**, **Hannah** and this year's **Radio Days**.

Morse says she is more concerned with 'attention to detail,' with things that 'are probably not that important. It's like crossing t's and dotting i's.' Rosenblum, she says, was 'more concerned with the forest than the trees, and I'm concerned with both. I guess I'm a perfectionist.'

'I have a feeling she spends a lot of time in the cutting room,' says Rosenblum, 'because she's painstaking, extremely painstaking'

Asked to describe the work she's proudest of, Morse says, 'It's funny; it's like the Prodigal Son. You think of the films which had the worst problems to face, **Zelig**, **Purple Rose** and **Radio Days**, afforded the greater challenges.'

(Washington Post Service)

4.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) An article should have a central point of interest: (a) a person, (b) an event, (c) an aspect of a problem, (d) a controversy. Focus will take shape through (a) overall structure and logic of a piece of writing, (b) lead or opening.

Lead should: (a) accord with the subject, (b) have a potential appeal for the reader and engage his attention. The lead or opening can: (a) be gentle and persuasive, (b) carry surprise, (c) have contradictory facts as starting point, (d) have a startling or significant quotation at the head.

- ii) Do you discover the focus immediately or gradually? Are you led to it logically? Do you think the opening is a good lead towards the focus of the article?
- iii) Anecdotes (a) add colour and human interest, (b) illustrate deeds, achievements, feelings, (c) substantiate generalizations and inferences, (d) give body to abstractions and arguments, (e) make the writing more readable.
- iv) Note how the anecdotes are (a) narrated (i.e. the style of narration), (b) related to the subject being discussed. Do they clarify/enliven the theme?

Activity 2

Hints

- i) Study the leads in the articles you have come across. Take a close look at the lead (first three paragraphs) in the attached article on Woody Allen's editor.
- ii) a) Rosenblum, Susan Morse's colleagues. Who else?
- b) How appropriate, how lively are the quotes? Note how the writer switches from quotation to his own comment and vice versa.
- c) Is it interspersed? Is it introduced without moving away from the theme?
- d) Look for those parts of the article/expressions that throw light on these two.

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