PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses *generic, viz. core, discipline specefic, elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern, which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the university has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade ''A''.

UGC Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Regulations, 2017 have mandated compliance with CBCS for UGC 2020 programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Bachelors Degree Programme (BDP) level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed by the Teachers, Officers & Staff of the university, and I heartily congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish you all a grand success.

Professor (Dr.) Ranjan Chakrabarti
Vice-Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University

Under Graduate Degree Programme

Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)

Subject : Honours in English (HEG)

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Course Code : CC-EG-05

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UG : English
(HEG)

Course : Indian Writing in English

Module - 1

Background Studies

Unit-1 ❐ Introducing Indian Writing in English

Structure

1.1.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to provide you a background of how the English language spread throughout the world and how Indian Writing in English developed as a result. This branch of English literature that went through different nomenclatures and phases of development has won wide recognition in the global literary scene. In this unit we shall also discuss the hybrid nature of the Indian English Literature and explain its scope in the context of the contemporary times.

1.1.2 Introduction

The story of the spread of English all over the world is indeed spectacular. We all know that the British imperial policies and colonial ventures were mainly responsible for the spread of the English language and literature. With the gradual improvement of technology over the centuries that resulted in a larger production and easier circulation of books, newspapers, journals and other reading materials across continents, the English language travelled to distant shores and took deep roots there through business interactions, academic curriculum, and everyday use. As a corollary, literary works too began to flourish in the colonies. Like many other formerly colonised countries, India too witnessed a healthy growth of a literature in English. Here it had a dialogue with local languages and this was mutually beneficial for the enrichment of all literatures. Indian Writing in English is now recognised as an indispensable part of the Indian literary scene. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar unambiguously states, “Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others”

(3). ‘‘Indian English Literature,” observes Subhendu Mund, ‘‘is the youngest among the literatures of India but the most vibrant one which has the ability to be a part of the Indian experience while reaching out to a larger English reading constituency all over the world” (7).

In the context of the above, it is quite natural for us now to offer Indian English literature as a full paper. Thus, in Course 5 you will study texts and contexts which are not British in content and spirit. Unlike other papers in your syllabus, it will deal with literary texts and contexts which are all Indian. As young men and women growing up in the new millennium, you may not know that even a few decades ago inclusion of Indian Writing in English as a full paper at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels was unthinkable. Research scholars too would not pick up their areas of critical investigation from Indian English Literature. Writing in 1985, Vasant A. Shahane pointed out, “In the mid-sixties most universities in India would not touch any research topic in this area [i.e., Indian English Literature] with a barge-pole. In those days, English departments simply did not get involved in *things Indian*. A few last bastions of purity still remain, but most universities have become more tolerant since then” (207; emphasis added). ‘Things Indian’ were undesirable at that point of time in the land of pure, white English literature. It was not simply part of the canon. But today, thanks to the changing nature of academic canons, it is quite usual for us to find Indian Writing in English as a core paper at the undergraduate and postgraduate English literature courses in Indian universities. Indian English poems, short stories, plays or novels figure as important components even in some high school syllabi. Thus, it is quite evident that Indian authors writing in English are very much part of the established canon of English literature now. Literatures written in English from other formerly colonised countries (African and Caribbean countries, for instance), along with literary works of marginalised communities such as Black American literature or Dalit literature (the latter mostly in English translation) have found their way into the canon. The focus has indeed shifted from the concept of English literature to that of literatures written in English because English has become the medium of cultural communication in the erstwhile British colonies as well. It is from this perspective that Indian literature in English has emerged as an important area of study.

In Module I, as you will see, we shall offer you a study of the socio-cultural background against which Indian English Studies developed. We shall begin from the beginning as you will find in Unit II of this Module. We shall offer a brief description of how English as a language spread throughout India, how English literature was introduced in educational institutions of the country, and how it shaped up new Indian literary sensibilities which

gradually gave birth to what we know today as Indian Writing in English. You will, I am sure, find this history fascinating. It will also be quite interesting to probe, from our own cultural locations, how Indian authors responded to the policies of colonialism, to the British cultural products, and to the aesthetic norms of their literature in particular. The dilemma of, to use Raja Rao's words, writing about issues which are 'ours' in a 'language that is not one's own' had to be negotiated by the early Indian writers in the beginning until the language itself was appropriated by 'us' in 'our' own ways. This happened not only in India but also in other countries formerly colonised by the British. As we have seen earlier, in the post colonial globalized environment English has been appropriated in the erstwhile colonies and the literary works from these countries have been accorded recognition worldwide. India too has its share of talented poets, short story writers, novelists, playwrights and non-fictional writers who have been received favourably by the readers spread all around the world. In this paper we shall study select works of some of these writers.

Activities:

1. A nine-part Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series entitled *The Story of English* which records the birth and growth of the English language will be, I am sure, very useful and enjoyable for you. Try to watch the series. You will have a comprehensive idea about how the English language spread all over the world.
2. There is also a companion volume to the series mentioned in Activity No. 1. This is Robert McCrum's The *Story of English* (New York: Viking, 1986). Reading the book will help you gather not only the historical background of the English but also their language (loan words, for example).
3. Watch on the YouTube: "The Adventure of English" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1XQx9pGGd0) and "Story of English" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FtSUPAM-uA)
4. In addition, also flip through *The Story of English in India* by N. Krishnaswami and Lalitha Krishnaswami (Cambridge University Press/Foundation Book, 2006).
5. In the Foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao observed, "One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (5). He made the comment in the context of the dilemma that an Indian English writer used to face in his time. Read the entire Foreword and comment briefly on whether things have changed now.

6. You have come across the word 'canon' earlier. Consult any book on literary terms and find out its meaning. Keep in mind the context in which we use the term.

1.1.3 Hybridity of Indian English Literature

As a result of the inter-cultural dialogue resulting from the colonial history of our country fictional and non-fictional works have proliferated. The hybrid nature of the literary works has been subjected to intense critical debates right from the beginning. This also generated some amusing descriptions of Indian English literary products. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar refers to an interesting comment supposedly made by Gordon Bottomley, a Georgian poet-dramatist: "'Matthew Arnold in a *sari*'—so Gordon Bottomley is said to have described typical Indo-Anglian poetry" (7). Interestingly, this hybrid literature is also dubbed as "Shakuntala in a mini-skirt" which shifts the focus to a more overtly visible embodied Indianness but retains the same emphasis on hybridity. The two descriptions above use sartorial metaphors to sustain the sense of 'doubleness' of the identity. Rushdie, however, employs a direct biological metaphor when he refers to Indian Writing in English as "the bastard child of Empire sired on India by the departing British" (Rushdie iii).

Miscegenation (meaning "the interbreeding of people considered to be of different racial types" but used here in the sense of cultural inter-mixture) of cultures and hybridised cultural products, however, are no longer viewed with derision as they were viewed a few decades back. They are, on the contrary, even given prominence in the context of the post-colonial celebration of the periphery. The cultural works originating from that source are received well. The changed reception patterns of hybrid literary works in the post-colonial environment are instrumental in the introduction and popularisation of Indian Writing in English. Makarand Paranjape rightly observes that "[b]y its very definition, it [Indian Writing in English] is a hybrid, a sort of liaison literature" (1050) but he uses the term 'hybridity' in a wider sense. He comments that it "mediat[es] between the contrary pulls of the metropolis and the nation, between a cosmopolitan modernity and ethnic traditionalism" (1050). In this hybrid form, Indian English literature has gradually reoriented itself to a global, transnational approach. Paranjape captures the trajectory of this movement thus: "Before independence, nationalism was the dominant ideology, while after independence a sort of internationalism has replaced it. Never has this shift been as pronounced as in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in IE [i.e., Indian English] fiction. To write in an [sic] transnational, cosmopolitan vein for an international market has proven to be incredibly profitable for the IE writer" (1050).

1.1.4 Indian Writing in English: Nomenclatures

The birth of this miscegenated category also generated some confusion about how to call this new branch of English literature. Critics of all hues debated over the issue of the right nomenclature (i.e naming or system of naming). The changing responses to the field are reflected in the shifting nomenclatures applied to this field of study. You may have noted how the designations changed over the decades. Initially, it was called "Anglo-Indian Literature." Edward Fairly Oaten was perhaps the first person to use the designation. The term was used to refer to the "writings of Englishmen in Indian [sic] on Indian themes" (Sarma). It soon gave way to another nomenclature "Indo-Anglian Literature" which replaced the prominence of the 'Anglo' elements by foregrounding the 'Indo' elements. "Indo-Anglian Literature" was used first by James H. Cousin (1883) and later by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. V .K. Gokak was in favour of the term "Indo-English." Mulk Raj Anand used the term "Indian-English Writing" with a hyphen in between the words 'Indian' and 'English.' For some time "Indian Writing in English" was used by the Central Institute of English and Other Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now known as English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). M. K. Naik's "Indian English Literature" received wide acceptance and was even recognised by the Sahitya Akademi, the national academy of India. All these nomenclatures were in fact engaged over a discursive battle on how much native/foreign, colonial/postcolonial or national/international the new body of literary works are. In our course, we have decided to call it "Indian Writing in English,' indicating the geographical origin of the literature and the national identity of the writers. It is also a widely used term. One is, however, at liberty to use M.K.Naik designated category of 'Indian English literature' as well.

Activities:

1. The two phrases – "Matthew Arnold in a *sari*" and "Shakuntala in a mini-skirt" – convey two different perspectives regarding the status of English in India. Try to reflect on the differences and note down the points.
2. Note down the different nomenclatures used for the Indian Writing in English. Are you satisfied with the one we are using in this course?
3. Trace how the meaning of the word 'hybrid' changed over the centuries and included 'cultural intermixture' in its semantic base. Consult Robert J. C. Young's *Colonial Desire* and Homi Bhabha's Foreword in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (edited by Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood) (see pp. xi-xiii) as well as *Location of Culture*. For a brief discussion of the evolution

of the term and how cultural hybridity became an important concept, see the sub-section "Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity" in Himadri Lahiri's book *Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism* (see pp. 60-64).

1.1.5 Scope of Indian Writing in English

The nomenclature 'Indian Writing in English' contains in it the concept of 'India' as a geo-cultural region where English is accepted as one of the many languages of communication. India as a nation-state, like other nation-states, has clearly defined borders, but interestingly India as a nation is much more expansive and inclusive. It includes, for example, people of Indian origin scattered in diaspora all over the world. English as a language also cannot be confined to any particular country (more so because of the history of colonialism associated with it); it always spills over national borders. In the context of the above, we need to be aware of the complex issues that the nomenclature evokes when used in a literary-cultural context. The main question that confronts us is: How inclusive/exclusive is the term? Who are to be included in the scope of the term?

The history of Partition of India inevitably queers the pitch in this regard. The geo-political spaces now called Pakistan and Bangladesh were at one time part of the nation-state called India. Before the creation of Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) they were very much part of Indian polity, society and culture. Should an author like Ahmed Ali who wrote both before and after the Partition but who migrated to Pakistan in the post-Partition period be included within the scope of the nomenclature? "Ali published in 1940 his novel *Twilight in Delhi which* has the early twentieth century city of Delhi as its background. … Such an important novel and novelist do not figure prominently in books on Indian English literature and are virtually absent in the academic syllabi of the English departments of Indian universities ostensibly because he is popularly and critically believed to be a 'Pakistani' English writer" (Lahiri, "Nation" 65). Subhendu Mund refers to another dimension of the problem. He mentions how a Pakistani scholar claims an Indian text to be a Pakistani text when there was no existence of Pakistan at the time. He speaks of how Dean Mahomet's (1759-1851) The *Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, while in the Service of the Honourable the East India Company, Written by Himself, in a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1794), considered to be 'the earliest specimen of Indian Writing in English,' was claimed by Alamgir Hashmi, a well-known Pakistani scholar, as a Pakistani author. Mund observes, "Needless to say, as Dean Mahomet belonged to the undivided India [the book's title itself says that he was *A Native of Patna in Bengal*] he is claimed by the Pakistani scholars as well" (7). All the above examples show nation-based categories such as "Indian Writing in English"

can be ambiguous as well as problematic. In order to avoid such ambiguities, critics can posit the literary history of nation-states which have not inherited the name 'India' in the proper historical perspective and can claim the pre-Partition literary tradition of the undivided India as the precursor to the post-Partition nation state/s.

Secondly, should we include the writings originally written in Indian languages and then translated into English (like many of the plays of Girish Karnad or Vijay Tendulkar) within the purview of Indian Writing in English? It appears that it is difficult to include this category of works within nomenclatures such as "Indian Writing in English" or "Indian English Literature" simply because they are *not written in English*. But it is equally true that these translated texts are truly "Indian" (an important word in the nomenclature/s) in content and spirit although not written directly in English. In order to avoid this problem, academicians/canon makers have created a sub-category called "Indian Writing in English Translation" which is studied under the broader category of "Indian Writing in English."

The third important issue that comes to mind is related to the status of the Indian diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee or Jhumpa Lahiri who have been writing from the diasporic space on themes related to India, Indians and Indianness. Many of them having the citizenship of the UK or USA may now claim themselves to be American or British writers and may have relegated their 'Indianness' to the past. Such cases cannot be determined in a simplistic, binary way. "One's identity is thus determined not merely by one's citizenship or place of residence. It is something cultural and ancestral as well. The 'citizenship' identity or a generic appellation based on national affiliations like Indian English literature is too ineffective to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of contemporary people in movement. It is a case of divided loyalty, of a composite identity comprising multiple factors like culture, memory, citizenship and so on. Writers in the diaspora are best examples of people having such identities" (Lahiri, "Nation" 67). They obviously form an important component of Indian Writing in English.

These are some of the questions you may ponder over in a more critical way and form your own opinion. There may be similar other issues which you may locate yourself and reflect on.

Activities:

1. Read the first chapter ("The Literary Landscape: The Nature and Scope of Indian English Literature") of M. K. Naik's book *A History of Indian English Literature* (see pp. 1-6) and locate some more problems like the ones mentioned above. What would be your response to what Naik observes about Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (see p. 3) in particular?

2. In his book mentioned above M.K.Naik defines Indian English literature in the following way:

> Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written *originally* in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither 'Anglo-Indian Literature', nor literal translations by others (as distinguished from creative translations by the authors themselves) can legitimately form part of this literature. (2; emphasis original)

   How far do you accept his view that 'creative translations [into English] by the authors themselves' should be included into the scope of Indian English literature? (See p. 2).
3. Naik also comments in the same book: "The crux of the matter is the distinctive literary phenomenon that emerges when an Indian sensibility tries to express itself originally in a medium of expression which is not primarily Indian" (3). What does Naik mean by the term 'Indian sensibility'? From your own spatio-temporal location how would you define it?

1.1.6 Summing Up

In this unit we have discussed how the English language spread throughout the world, giving rise to unique, hybrid English literatures. Indian Writing in English developed out of the British colonisation of India and is essentially hybrid in nature. It was in the beginning known as 'Anglo-Indian Literature,' but later, changing orientations, picked up other nomenclatures such as 'Indo-Anglian Literature,'' Indo-English literature,' 'Indian-English Literature' (with a hyphen between 'Indian' and 'English'), 'Indian Writing in English' and 'Indian English Literature' (without any hyphen). The use of all these nomenclatures indicates how critical and sensitive academicians had been throughout its span of development. This unit has also probed into the scope of this genre, explaining in the process issues such as whether English translations from Bhasa literatures and works of diasporic authors of Indian descent should be studied as part of Indian Writing in English. In the next unit we shall focus more elaborately on how the English language took strong roots in India.

1.1.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Analyse Indian Writing in English as a distinct field of studies. Critically discuss different nomenclatures applied to it. (In answering the question, you should go through the 'Activities' sections of this unit as well)

2. Makarand Paranjape observes that Indian English Literature "[b]y its very definition" is "a hybrid, a sort of liaison literature." How do you respond to the above comment? Elucidate your opinion.
3. Critically explain the scope of Indian English literature.
4. How would you define Indian English Literature/Indian Writing in English? How far can you accept M.K. Naik's definition? Explain.
5. Subhendu Mund observes, "Indian English Literature is the youngest among the literatures of India but the most vibrant one which has the ability to be a part of the Indian experience while reaching out to a larger English reading constituency all over the world" (7). How far do you agree with the above comment? Explain.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. "In those days, English departments simply did not get involved in *things Indian*." In what context did Vasant A. Shahane make the comment? What did he want to convey? Explain.
2. Bring out the nuanced meanings in the phrase "Shakuntala in a mini-skirt," a description of the Indian Writing in English.
3. What problems did Partition of India create in the context of subcontinental literatures written in English? Explain.
4. Mention some works which are English translations of Bhasa literatures. Give your considered opinion about whether these should come within the canon of Indian Writing in English.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. What do you mean by the term 'canon'?
2. "Matthew Arnold in a *sari*" – Who originally used the epithet and why?
3. Who is Gordon Bottomley?
4. Who was perhaps the first person to use the nomenclature "Anglo-Indian Literature"?
5. Who first used the term "Indo-Anglian Literature"?
6. Who wrote *Twilight in Delhi* and when?
7. Who was Ahmed Ali?
8. Which book is considered to be 'the earliest specimen of Indian Writing in English'?

1.1.8 Suggested Readings

Bhabha, Homi K. Foreword. *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. Ed. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood. 2015. London: Zed Books,1997. xi-xiii.

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—."Nation, Nation-based Category and Indian English Literature: A Belated View." *Indian Fiction in English: Mapping the Contemporary Literary Landscape*. Eds. Sajalkumar Bhattacharya et al. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2014. 63-76.

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Young, Robert J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Unit - 2 ❐ The English Language in India : Zones of Contact

Structure

1.2.1 Objectives

In this unit, we shall focus on the arrival of the English language in India and how it consolidated its place in the cultural life of the country. We will identify specifically the zones of contact through which English spread. This unit will also indicate how the dissemination of the language led to the creation of a class of people who began to write literary works in the adopted language.

1.2.2 Introduction

We have seen in the earlier unit how colonial ventures were largely responsible for the spread of English throughout the world. But it was not the only avenue through which English made its presence felt in the erstwhile colonies like India. There were other ways through which the language flourished. British traders and Christian missionaries were indeed precursors to the colonisers. They prepared the ground for the eventual arrival of the British colonists. East India Company itself was a trading company. The early travellers, through their interactions with the common people, not only introduced the language but also helped to consolidate it in the new space. The process, therefore, started much before Macaulay's Minutes (1835) which officially introduced English as the medium of education. Thus, we need to remember that it was not the educational institutions but the actual day-to-day interactions between the British traders and priests on the one hand and Indians on the other that paved the way for the informal entry of English in the socio-cultural life of the Indians. Private English medium schools later sprung up even before the acceptance of Macaulay's Minute which produced a good crop of individuals who comprised Indian intellectuals. The first apologists for English

education such as Raja Rammohun Roy were the products of pre-Macaulay English education. They strongly supported the cause of the English education in India.

1.2.3 The English Language in India: Zones of Contact

Literatures emerge out of specific historical and socio-cultural contexts, and Indian Writing in English was no exception. The birth and growth of this literature testify to the fact. We have noted in the earlier unit that it developed as a result of a complex, asymmetrical political and interracial relationship between the British colonisers and the Indians. Gradually that gave rise to mutually beneficial cultural dialogues. In this section, we shall discuss how several zones of cultural intersections emerged to facilitate the spread of English and the concomitant cultural expressions, mainly in the form of a new literary genre.

Many critics have commented on this aspect of Indian English language and literature. For example, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, one of the early scholars of Indian Writing in English, observes, "England and India had come together, or had been accidentally thrown together; and out of their intimacy—whether legitimate or illegitimate—had come this singular offspring that is Anglo-Indian literature" (2). We have noted some of other critics' comments in this regard in Unit 1. The process of the dialogue, we have observed previously, started at the level of British traders, missionaries, and East India Company officials on the one hand and Indian middlemen and other common Indians (businessmen, for instance) on the other. In his interesting article entitled "English in India and Indian Literature in English: The Early History 1579-1834," Vinay Dharwadker analyses how contact zones developed as a result of pre-colonial and colonial British negotiations of the Indian space. We shall discuss these contact zones now.

Dharwadker's survey offers us a comprehensive view of the 'zones' where the interracial contacts took place. He argues that these "zones were first formed between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries but continued to serve as the most common sites of British-Indian interaction afterward, modifying their structures and functions with changing circumstances in the colonial and postcolonial periods, and accommodating the additional space of acculturation that appeared when English education was institutionalized in India in the mid-nineteenth century" (102). These zones were the sites of the early usage of the English language in India. This led to the creation of a new group of individuals whose association with the East India Company equipped them to write business documents and literary narratives. It was out of Dean Mahomet's (1759-1851) – his name is spelled differently – association with the Bengal Army, which he

joined in 1769, and his experience as a traveler in England, that his narrative *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) was born. In the earlier unit we have referred to the full title of this narrative: *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, while in the Service of the Honourable the East India Company, Written by Himself, in a Series of Letters to a Friend*. This is the first book written in English by an Indian. (In this connection we should also remember that the first fictional narrative written by an Indian in English is Kylas Chunder Dutt's "A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945" published in 1835, and the first full-fledged novel written by an Indian in English is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, serialised in 1864 in a weekly periodical called *Indian Field*). In this section, we shall concentrate on the zones of contact and briefly discuss the socio-political and literary impact of the interracial interactions. For that we will rely mainly on Dharwadker's excellent article mentioned earlier.

Dharwadker argues that the English language made its presence felt in India much before the actual colonialism took place. He mentions the names of two British travellers in particular – Father Thomas Stephens, a Roman Catholic, and Ralph Filch, a merchant: "Stephens and Fitch were … the prototypical representatives of two entire classes of historical agents—the missionary and the merchant" (Dharwadker 98). Stephens "lived in Salsette and Goa for over thirty-five years" and wrote "a mixed Marathi-Konkani version of the Gospel known as the *Christian Purana* which was published posthumously in Goa in 1640" (Dharwadker 97). However, he did not leave behind any written work in English. But he used to write personal letters to his father in English. Dharwadker informs us that "Richard Haklyut acquired either the original or a copy of the first letter that Stephens sent home from India – on November 2, 1579 – and included it in the original version of *The principall navigations, voiages, and discoveries of the English nation* (1589), thus making it the first (though unauthorized) representation in print of an Englishman's actual experience of India" (97). Ralph Filch, the other Englishman, travelled widely in "what are now India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia," and published the accounts of his travel in the expanded version of Haklyut's book (1599-1600) (Dharwadkar 98).

Gradually, Indians' familiarity with the English language grew as they came more and more in contact with British traders and missionaries. An important source of familiarity was the books, periodicals and other writings which were shipped from England. Rosinka Chaudhuri explains this process thus:

> English poetry, it might safely be surmised, arrived in India from about the seventeenth century onward in the knapsacks, trunks, bags, and portmanteaus of traders and adventurers intent on making their fortunes in the East. It then proceeded to establish itself among readers in exile and readers new to the English language with astonishing rapidity, fueled in the most part by the newspaper and periodical print culture that had spread through urban and semi-urban settlements in every part of the country. (1)

Thus, through the socio-cultural dynamics mentioned above, the English language found a solid foothold in India.

Now let us take a broad view of the various channels and identify the specific areas of contact responsible for the germination of interest in the English language and literature in the Indians. Dharwadker mentions the following contact zones in his article:

(a) The Zone of Employment;

(b) The Zone of Marriage and Family;

(c) The Zone of Religious Conversion;

(d) The Zone of Friendship and Social Relations.

The *first* zone of contact ("The Zone of Employment") created a group of Indian *dubhashis* (literally, those who can speak two languages). In fact, they could speak not only English but also Portuguese, Dutch, French, Persian and many Indian languages. They were intermediaries in business during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century. Burton Stein comments:

> Indeed, the numerous clerks of the East India Company's commercial, and later legal and political, offices learned their jobs by sitting with relatives who were employed by the Company. They learned to write and keep the records without pay until they were proficient enough to be employed themselves. English-medium schools came later, and enrolments there increased rapidly during the later nineteenth century. (qtd. in Dharwadker 103)

In the eighteenth century, communication was carried out by three "types of *dubhashis*—the clerk-interpreter, the personal manager, and the indigenous scholar—… [they were] the first Indians to become literate in English" (Dharwadker 104). Dharwadker argues that

> [w]ithin the first one hundred years of its existence, this zone had successfully acculturated three or four generations of Indians 'on the job.' The earliest Indian

> writers in English—Din Muhammad, C. V .Boriah, and Rammohun Roy—encountered and learned to speak English, acquired their English literacy, and adapted themselves to British and European culture in this zone, using the resources they already possessed as literate Indian multi-linguals. (105)

The large domestic retinue of servants and other employees and the soldiers in the army who were anglicised to some extent picked up English from their masters and officers respectively.

The *second* category relates to the ‘‘Zone of Marriage and Family.” Through this zone, English entered deeper into the family sphere and wider social space.

> Starting in the late seventeenth century, the zone of interracial marriage and family Anglicized a large number of Indian women, and sometimes also their original families. Anglo-Indian children usually grew up with English (the father-tongue) as their first language at home, and often with an Indian language (the mother-tongue) as a second, often pidginized and creolized, medium of communication. As Christian children, they were nurtured in a well-defined though heterogeneous (and internally divided) community of British, European, Eurasian, and Indian Christians. They shared a literate Anglocentric culture with their parents and, like their Indian mothers, they were deeply acculturated to Western ways of life, thought, and expression.... (Dharwadker 106)

Dharwadker points out that this zone “quickly became a site of literate Anglicization on the fringes of Indian society, and produced a number of important Indian-English writers, or affected the lives and careers of several figures in the tradition, from the earliest historical phase” (109). British businessmen, employees, and soldiers (as well as those of other European communities, such as the Portuguese) who were deprived of the company of European women either married Indian women or developed affairs with them. Children of mixed parentage were born out of this relationship. These children were mostly baptised as Christians or were converted later. Usually, British men and Indian women formed such families. They, along with their children, constituted a group conversant with the English language, literature, and culture. Henry Derozio belongs to this ‘zone.’ His contribution to Indian Poetry in English has been etched in gold. Some prominent post-colonial writers who may be categorised in this zone are Anita Desai, Dom Moraes, Ruskin Bond, Eunice de Souza and Melanie Silgardo.

Religious conversion was another avenue – the *third* – for acculturation. A large number of Indians were converted into Christianity. The converted included not only the poor

sections of the society, but also a sizable number of English-educated members of the influential families. The poor usually received training and education under the supervision of Churches. The rich too got admitted to well-known missionary schools and colleges.

Besides these zones, the English language also thrived through a *fourth* channel. There were often instances of good friendship between the British individuals and their Indian counterparts, which contributed to the mutual exchange of knowledge and understanding. This friendship, mostly in true egalitarian spirit, often grew in the "the fuzzy edges of the zone of employment." "If some of the closest social bonds in the pre-colonial period were between young Company officials and their personal *dubhashis*, in the early colonial period some of them were between Orientalist administrator-scholars and missionary-scholars and their Indian assistants and collaborators" (Dharwadker 110). Dharwadker also observes, "Starting in the late eighteenth century, British-Indian friendships based on mutual respect, depth of personal feeling and commitment, shared attitudes, and common intellectual and artistic interests were founded in a variety of contexts"(110). He provides some very useful examples of such friendships:

> [T]he colonial literary examples include Din Muhammad, Godfrey Evans Baker, and William A. Bailie; Rammohun Roy and William Adam, Lant Carpenter, William Ellery Channing, and Joseph Tuckerman; Henry Derozio, David Drummond, and John Grant; Pandita Ramabai and Dorothea Beale; and Manmohan Ghose and Laurence Binyon. (Dharwadker 110)

The tradition of friendship continued during the rest of the colonial rule and was most spectacularly evident in the instances of creative writers, intellectuals, political and social activists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and others. Tagore's university was the site of several such friendships. "In all such cases, friendships and social relations across racial and national boundaries vitalized the writers, stimulated their literary activities and intellectual growth, increased their degree of acculturation, and contributed directly to their readerships and reputations. This zone has a literary dimension in itself, in that its actuality appears to contradict the bleak perspectives on East-West friendship that have been thematized in British as well as Indian writing about India in the twentieth century" (Dharwadker 110).

Dharwadker considers two of the above-mentioned zones to be most significant so far as Indian Writing in English is concerned:

> the zone of conversion and the zone of interracial marriage and family together produced a high proportion of the major Indian-English writers of the nineteenth

century, from Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Govin Chunder Dutt, his brother Girish, and his daughters Toru and Aru (the first two Indian women poets in English), and to Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (the first Indian woman prose-writer in English). The rate of conversion has decreased in the twentieth century, but this zone has continued to produce Indian-English writers, Jayanta Mahapatra and Deba Patnaik being two intriguing instances in recent times. (108-9)

Activities:

1. What does the word '*dubhashis*' mean? What languages could they speak?
2. How many types of 'dubhashis could be found during the initial period of the spread of the English language?
3. Who are 'Anglo-Indians'? How was the word used in the early period of Indian English Writings?
4. Consult appropriate sources and find out the meanings of the two words 'pidgin' and 'creole.'
5. Write short notes on the following:

   Dean Muhammad, C. V. Boriah, Rammohun Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Henry Derozio, Girish Dutt, Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Anita Desai, Dom Moraes, Ruskin Bond, Eunice de Souza and Melanie Silgardo, Jayanta Mahapatra and Deba Patnaik. (Consult books on the history of Indian Writing in English and other appropriate sources)
6. Arrange chronologically the names mentioned in Activity No. 5.
7. Try to gather some information about Haklyut and his *The principal navigations: voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation* (1599-1600).

1.2.4 Emergence of Missionary Educational Institutions

The contribution of English missionary schools and colleges to the development of education in India should be specifically mentioned. The missionaries were "[o]riginally banned from the territories of the East India Company for fears of upsetting Indian religious sensibilities" but were eventually "allowed to operate after 1843" (Bellenoit 369). The Sepoy Mutiny (1857) too disrupted the missionary efforts for some time, but unofficially the activities continued: "ironically, in northern India missionaries came to be relied

upon by a cash-strapped Education Department" (Bellenoit 370). Bellenoit mentions that some early missionary schools were established in Bombay, Bengal, and Punjab. Iyengar mentions that private schools "had been started as early as 1717 at Cuddalore near Madras, 1718 at Bombay (by Richard Cobbe, a Chaplain), and 1720 at Calcutta, endowed by the Thomlinsons" (26). The Hindu College, by far the most important institution to have an impact on the life of the nation, was established in 1817 in Calcutta. Thanks to the initiative of persons such as Raja Rammohan Roy, David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde East it came into being and became a robust centre of creative and intellectual activities. It became Presidency College in 1855. Serampore College was also established in 1818 – one year after the Hindu College. The names of missionaries such as Carey, Ward, and Marshman are associated with it.

These missionary schools "came to dominate education and were credited with doing much to push the frontiers of western pedagogy in their efforts to propagate their faith" ((Bellenoit 370). Bellenoit informs us that the network of Anglican mission schools spread across north India by 1900. These schools were visible both in small towns and big cities. "At one point nearly 70% of high schools (both AV and English) and secondary schools in UP were mission-run, and they ran numerous hostels, particularly after the education reforms of 1904" (Bellenoit 370-71). Quite a significant number of intellectuals of the colonial period were students at such missionary schools. Interestingly, this trend continued even in the post-colonial period. Dharwadker provides a short list of the post-colonial writers who were beneficiaries in this respect:

> As in the nineteenth century, a high proportion of Indian-English writers in the twentieth has been educated at or professionally associated with English-medium Christian missionary institutions, among the notable examples being Bharati Mukherjee (Loreto Convent, Calcutta), Eunice de Souza and Adil Jussawalla (St. Xavier College, Bombay), and Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, I. Allan Sealy, Mukul Kesavan, and Makarand Paranjape (St Stephens College, Delhi). (109)

The impact and legacy of colonial education have thus continued to be felt even in the most recent decades.

1.2.5 Summing Up

In this unit, we have studied how the English language spread to the length and breadth of India. Four important zones of contact which were responsible for this dissemination have been discussed in this unit. These zones are: (a) The Zone of Employment; (b) The Zone of Marriage and Family; (c) The Zone of Religious Conversion; and (d) The Zone

of Friendship and Social Relations. We have shown how these zones of contact contributed to the creation of a vibrant environment for the spread of English and introduction of a new branch of literature written in English, known as Indian Writing in English. The role of missionary schools has also been assessed in this unit.

1.2.6 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. What do you mean by 'zone of contact'? How many Zones of Contact does Vinay Dharwadker mention? Critically discuss them.
2. Explain the contribution of the missionaries in the spread of the English language and literature in India.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Write brief notes on Father Thomas Stephens and Ralph Filch.
2. Why is the "Zone of Marriage and Family" considered important for the spread of English? Explain.
3. Write a short note on the growth of missionary schools in India.
4. Which two zones of contact are considered most important and why?

Short-answer Type Questions

1. When did Macaulay's Minutes come into effect?
2. Who was Dean Mahomet?
3. What is the full title of Dean Mahomet's book?
4. When was Dean Mahomet's *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* published?
5. When were zones of contact first formed?
6. Which is the first fictional narrative written by an Indian in English? When was it published?
7. Which is the first Indian English novel? Who wrote it? When was it first published and where?
8. Name some well-known Indian writers in English who were students of missionary schools.

1.2.7. Suggested Readings

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Unit - 3 ❐ Indian Writing in English: The Colonial Period

Structures

1.3.1 Objectives

This unit will focus on the historical and cultural background of the emergence of Indian English Writing and briefly map out the literary works of the colonial period. This will include a discussion on the rise of a class of Indians who were enthusiastic about the reception of the language and culture of the British colonisers. There also emerged a group of intellectuals who, taking cue from the British literature and early works of the expatriate Englishmen in India, started writing in English. In this connection, this unit will discuss how learning English was fast becoming a pre-requisite for securing jobs in the expanding colonial administration. It will also briefly discuss the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy that culminated in Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Education" (1835).

1.3.2 Introduction

In the earlier units you have read about how English spread as an important language of communication in the early years of the British settlement in India.K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar states, "Indians learnt at first to read and speak and comprehend English, and they soon started writing also" (29). Of course, there existed a positive environment in which avid learners could pick up the nitty-gritty of the new language. The corpus of various genres of works written in English by the expatriate Englishmen provided them a model and

the English-knowing people began to produce their own crop of Anglophone works. These works drew the attention of enthusiastic Indian readers many of whom were eager to consume whatever works written in English were available. The works arriving from England also had great demand. All these created an appropriate environment for the production of fictional and non-fictional writings in the newly learnt language. Once the trend set in, Anglophone works by Indians began to proliferate. At this stage Indian Writing in English "range[d] from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse—epics, for example!" ((Iyengar 30). As Iyengar states, "Indian writing in English was but one manifestation of the new creative urge in India—what is often referred to as the literary renaissance in India" (30). He employs a botanical metaphor to suggest the depth of the roots that the new language and literature have taken: "The exhausted, almost sapless, native soil received the new rich fertiliser from the West, and out of this fruitful union—as it happened in Elizabethan England—a new literature was born. Bengali led the way, but the others were not slow to follow" (Iyengar 30). This cross-fertilisation worked effectively in the case of both Indian Writings in English and indigenous Indian literatures. The novel as a genre, for example, took roots in Indian literatures. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Bengali novels are appropriate examples of this cultural transaction.

1.3.3 Birth of a New Class

The enthusiastic reception of English gradually created a new class of 'native' people. It is often wrongly assumed that implementation of the recommendations of Macaulay's "Minutes on Education" (1835) triggered the process of the formation of this class. In fact, as Arvind Krishna Mehrotra observes, this "class had long been in the process of formation" (5). It "consisted largely of the new urban elite, the rising *bhadralok* population of Calcutta" (5). Many of them had "landed property in the interior districts, but were drawn to the city by the promise of office jobs in the expanding British administration, the key to which was a knowledge of English" (5-6). Some members of this class were fond of aping the English culture; they uninhibitedly exhibited their uncritical appreciation of the changing cultural norms and enjoyed flouting the norms of their own society. Their deviant behaviour drew derisive comments from the conservative elements of the Indian society. Macaulay's statements in "Minutes on Education" further complicated the situation. Jasodhara Bagchi observes that Macaulay's visualisation of the new Indian class of the go-betweens as "Indian in colour and dress and English in thinking gave rise to a typology of 'baboo'" (149). This typology "haunted the literature of the nineteenth century" – it "travelled to and fro. From Dickens to Kipling in England, from Bankim to Samar Sen in Bengal, 'baboo' has stood for the caricature of a hybrid" (Bagchi 149).

This reaction to the 'Baboo' culture resulted from some Indians' submission to a consistent trend in the stereotyping resorted to by English intellectuals who looked down upon the Indians and ideologically visualised the creation of an indigenous group of go-betweens in the colonies. British colonial administrators and intellectuals such as Macaulay, Charles Trevelyan and James Mill firmly believed in the superiority of the British empire. They also believed in the inferiority of Indians who should be educated and civilized. Macaulay's conviction in the superiority of British civilisation comes out in his "Speech of 10 July 1833" where he asserted that even if the colonial British presence in India was fated to end, it would leave behind "the *imperishable empire* of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws" (qtd. in Niranjana 140; emphasis added). This ideology is again reflected in his notorious statement in "Minutes on Education" that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (qtd. in Niranjana 140). Charles Trevelyan, Macaulay's brother-in-law, also made similar statements. He, for instance, asserted, "Educated in the same way, interested in the same objects, engaged in the same pursuits with ourselves, they [Indian elites] become more British than Hindus …." (qtd. in Niranjana 140). He felt that the Indian elites would consider the British as their "natural protectors and benefactors" and that "the summit of their [the Indians'] ambition is, to resemble us" (qtd. in Niranjana 140). Bagchi explains, "Poetry, philosophy and political economy were designed to create a civilized domain in which the educated Bengali *bhadralok* would feel empowered by the steady incorporation of the native land mass into the hegemonic culture of Europe" (Bagchi 149).

Although such ideological formulations shaped the worldview of a section of the society, they also gave birth to creative writers and intellectuals who produced narratives of contestations that the British colonists did not relish. The English language as the newly acquired tool also functioned to contest the imperialistic designs and purposes of the colonising forces. We shall refer to al least two such fictional narratives later.

Activities:

1. Who provided to the rising Indian English-educated class of people a model for writing works, literary or otherwise, in English?
2. "It is said that even in 1834-5, 32,000 English books sold in India, as against 13,000 in Hindi, Hindustani and Bengali, and 1,500 in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. The vogue for English books increased, and the demand came even more from the Indian than from the Englishman in India" (Iyengar 28). Comment on the extract given above.

3. "The exhausted, almost sapless, native soil received the new rich fertiliser from the West, and out of this fruitful union—as it happened in Elizabethan England—a new literature was born" (Iyengar 30). Consult relevant books and gather information about what happened in Elizabethan England in this context.

4. Who is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee? Gather relevant information about his literary works and write a short note on him.

5. How do you explain the expression ''the rising *bhadralok* population of Calcutta"?

1.3.4 Anglicist-Orientalist Debate and Macaulay's "Minute on Education"

As the English gradually began to settle down in India, they began to consider the nature of education to be imparted to the native students. Initially they were in favour of retaining or reviving languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. With this in mind, they established the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, and the Sanskrit College in Benaras in 1792. But soon due to colonial administrative requirements and well-orchestrated demands from the 'natives' themselves, the scale tilted towards the English education. Indians felt the need for 'a liberal education.' Naik refers to a Calcutta Brahmin Baidyanath Mukhopadhyaya who told the Chief Justice of Supreme Court that "many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming establishment of education of their children in a liberal manner" (10). Raja Rammohan Ray who was an ardent supporter of English education wrote his now famous *Letter on Indian Education* (1823) to Lord Amherst. He observed that "the Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness" (qtd. in Naik 11). He argues in favour of

> a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing … useful sciences, which may be accomplished by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus. (qtd. in Naik 11)

As a result of strong appeals for the introduction of English education on the part of the Indians, Hindu College, as we have mentioned earlier, was established in Calcutta on 20 January 1817 for the education of "the sons of respectable Hindoos." The students at the Hindu College received, according to the observations made in 1830 by the Committee on Public Instruction, "a command of the English language, and …familiarity with its literature and science…rarely equalled by any schools in Europe" (qtd. in Mehrotra 6). It was followed by the foundation of Anglo-Hindu School in 1822. This created an

enthusiasm for learning the language not only in Calcutta but also in the villages of Bengal.

In fact, the debates about the choice of the medium of education which came to be known as Anglicist-Orientalist controversy raged for about four decades. Some important members of the East India Company initially did not want to introduce English education as it might foster an anti-colonial attitude. In fact, that such an apprehension was not baseless is established by the fact that two early works in English were anti-British in theme. The first fictional work in English by an Indian – Kylas Chunder Dutt's "A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945" published in 1835 – is a narrative of an anti-colonial 'nationalist' rebellion led by a young man called Bhoobun Mohun who was educated at the 'Anglo-Indian College.' His cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of Twentieth Century* (1845) is also a futuristic account of a tribal revolt against the colonial rule. Despite such an apprehension, colonial administrators gradually, particularly from the end of the eighteenth century, felt the need for educating the natives through the English language for their own convenience and benefit. The emergence of this new group of English educated natives who would be employed as 'writers' (clerks), interpreters and lower officials in the colonial administration also marked the beginning of a new chapter in the colonial history of India. It paved the way for the birth of the English writings by the Indians themselves. The Christian religious agenda of converting the Hindus also intensified the urgency of establishing missionary schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the South and in places like Bengal and Bombay. These were the obvious attempts at bringing the 'conquered people' within the fold of the English public life, albeit on the fringes, as accessories to their purposes. It is for all these reasons that demand for the English education gained momentum. As K. K. Chatterjee states, "The Home Office despatches from 1824 onwards went on being increasingly insistent on re-orienting Indian education to teach the useful science and literature of Europe" (qtd. in Naik 10). The Anglicist-Orientalist debate over the choice of medium of education was solved ultimately by Thomas Babington Macaulay ''who combined in himself the spirit of staunch Evangelism, Messianic imperialism and Whig liberalism… He stated emphatically that it was both necessary and possible to 'make the natives of this country good English scholars' and that 'to this end all our efforts ought to be directed'" (Naik 12). In his "Minutes on Education" (1835) the oft-quoted lines occur, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (qtd. in Mehrotra 5).

The Act of 1813 had set aside funds for colonial education for Indians, but the language debate, as mentioned earlier, continued for years. The issue was being discussed both in London and Calcutta, and prominent Englishmen and Indians participated in it. The Resolution of 7 March 1835 recommended that the allotted funds should "be henceforth employed in imparting to the native population knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language" (Percival Spear qtd. in Niranjana 139). This happened during the tenure of Lord Bentinck. For all practical and legal purposes, this resolution put an end to the Anglicist-Orientalist debate. Now Persian, the formal language for administrative jobs, was gradually phased out.

As students of Indian Writing in English we understand that it was a crucial historical moment for the growth (if not birth) of Indian Writing in English. The result of imposing the English language and culture on Indians was that it whetted the desire for not only English literature but also for a literature that would be produced in English by the English-educated Indian elites. Thus, Niranjana rightly claims that "the agent of this change would indeed be 'English literature'" (140). The study of English literature gradually developed in this historical context. English literature was projected as a representation of a superior space of cultural reality, containing a core of '*universal*' truths. Although such a logic erases the local and the specific, it found a positive reception in India. Many also felt that English literary works provided a model for improvement of moral behaviour and a way out from the superstitions that plagued the contemporary Indian society. Bagchi argues that contemporary Bengali elites were also in search of a space "in which neither the administrative measures nor the religious practices could be allowed to intervene directly" (149). English literary studies, she opines, addressed this need. English literature "formed an integral part of the new learning that enabled the self-construction of the new Indian male" (149).

1.3.5 Social Reformation and Self-Consolidation

This was a period of transformation as a heightened social and cultural consciousness developed and there was evidence of a new spirit of reformation. Raja Rammohan Ray founded the Brahmo Samaj which sought to refashion Hinduism in the monotheist form. It was later taken forward by Prince Dwarakanath Tagore and Keshab Chunder Sen. Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj followed. The establishment in 1875 of the Anglo-Arabic College (later turned into the Aligarh Muslim University) instilled confidence in the members of the Muslim community. The infatuation of the earlier generations, 'the first fruits of English education,' with things English was effectively counterbalanced by the spirit and enthusiasm generated by these socio-religious movements. All these

also gave rise to a political awareness among the Indians as manifested through the foundation of the British India Association (1839), the Bengal British India Society (1843), the British Indian Association of Calcutta (1851), and the Indian National Congress (1885). Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal (1905) aroused a strong anti-British sentiment and gave rise to nationalist writings. R.C. Majumdar observes, '[S]tarting as a purely local movement, [this protest] led to and merged itself in a national struggle of All India character against the British, which never ceased till India won her independence' (qtd. in Naik 34). It was M.K. Gandhi who led the national movement. The decades following the First World War was clearly marked by his leadership in the anti-colonial nationalist political movement. His preaching of non-violence as a method of political movements which was applied to political programmes such as Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience, or Quit India movements fired the imagination of the people from all walks of life and made him a veritable iconic figure. He also had a significant impact on literary representations particularly in the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan.

Activities:

1. Prepare a chronological list of prominent educational institutions, both before and after Macaulay's "Minute" (1835), and write a short note on their impact on society.
2. **"**By 1857, consolidation of British power under the East India Company had taken place, and after the brief nightmare of the Mutiny, the Crown took over responsibility from the Company. From 1857 to 1900 English education took rapid strides, and the climate was favourable for a new flowering of the creative Indian genius" (Iyengar 9-10). Give your response to the above comment.
3. "Distance was being abridged, a common medium of communication was being established though only at the higher levels, modern European scientific techniques (including medicine and surgery) were being introduced, and India was being led out—so it was thought—from secure and *static mediaevalism* to restless, *dynamic modernism*" (Iyengar 29; emphases added). Comment critically on the nature of the changes taking place at different levels.
4. "By 1835, even before Macaulay's 'Minute' had formalized English education in British India, a vocal and articulate bilingual intelligentsia had created a public sphere for itself in Bengal, one where it debated and disagreed but also cohered as a social group. Its members owned newspapers, journals, and presses and this was one crucible of ideas where an emergent nationalism articulated itself." Consult relevant sources, collect useful information about the 'public sphere' mentioned

above and write a critical note on the rise of the 'articulate intelligentsia' and emergence of the new public sphere.

5. Write short notes on the following:

   Raja Rammohan Ray, Thomas Babington Macaulay, M.K. Gandhi, Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj

1.3.6 Literary Works: Colonial Period

By the year 1800 "an assortment of texts in English – grammars, dictionaries, teaching aids, phrase books, and translations of literary works, digests, and compendiums" was available to the reading public in India (Mehrotra 4). Originally. All these works "were meant to facilitate colonisation and explain the new acquisition both to the Company's servants in India and to the avid literary and scientific community back home in England" (Mehrotra 4). But at the same time the number of works written in English by Indians was also picking up. Mehrotra observes that these early writings by Indians – poetry, fiction, drama, travel, and belle-lettres – were read with great interest by the contemporary readers in the country. The very fact "of [their] being [written] in English, [these] audacious acts of mimicry and self-assertion" had great impact on the members of the newly formed Indian intellectuals (Mehrotra 6). In his book *Recollections of My School-days* Lal Behari Day offers a very vivid description of how enthusiastically English was learnt both in urban and rural Bengal before 1834. It is also important to note that "the themes they touched on and the kinds of social issues they engaged with would only be explored by other Indian literatures several decades later" (Mehrotra 6).

Indian English works such as Dean Mahomet's *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794**),** Cavelly Venkata Boria's "Accounts of the Jains" (written in 1803 and published in 1809) and Rammohan Ray's "A Defence of Hindu Theism" had appeared before 1835. Krishna Mohan Banerjea's *The Persecuted* (1831) was the first play in Indian Writing in English. It represents the socio-cultural scenario of Bengal that was unmistakably changing during the period and the way the conservative sections of the society were responding to the changes. The conflict in the play arises from the clashes of socio-cultural values that the two opposing sections represented. Kylas Chunder Dutt's "A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945" (1835), the first fictional narrative in English by an Indian, represents the political scene in which discontent was growing in Calcutta against the foreign rule. It is, as we have mentioned earlier, a futuristic fiction that deals with a failed rebellion taking place in 1945 (hundred and ten years later). It may be called an early Indian English speculative narrative of anti-British proto-nationalism. It was originally

published in *Calcutta Literary Gazette, or Journal of Belles Lettres, Science, and the Arts* (Vol. III, New Series No. 75, 6th June 1835) edited by David Lester Richardson. Banerjee who converted to Christianity was a member of the "Young Bengal" and was the founder-editor of *The Enquirer* (1831-5). Dutt was a student at the Hindu College where Richardson was the Principal. We have also mentioned earlier that a decade later his cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt wrote another speculative fiction entitled *The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the Twentieth Century* originally published in the journal *Saturday Evening Hurkaru* of 25 May 1845. It has the second decade of the twentieth century as its background. Like its predecessor, this work too is the narrative of a rebellion, this time successful. The rebellion ousted the British from the country and established an independent republic. Like Kylas Chunder Dutt's work, it too evokes a proto-nationalist passion. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Rajmohan's Wife* is the first full-length novel written by an Indian in English. The novel representing the distress of a female character called Matangini was serialised in the journal *The Indian Field* in 1864. Interestingly, some women fiction writers also appeared in the early period. Mention may be made of some of their works: Toru Dutt's *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* which was an incomplete work (1878), Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1895) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life*, and Shevantibai M. Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* (1895). (There were many other novels, mostly by minor novelists. Kindly see pp. 106-109 of Naik's book mentioned in Suggested Reading section). There were three very important novelists during the "The Gandhian Whirlwind Period [of] 1920-1947" many of whose works are landmarks in the history of Indian English novels. These three novelists – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao – are called the 'triumvirate' of the genre. The influence of Gandhi's movements and ideas was palpable in their works. M.K. Naik observes,

> The works of K. S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao would not perhaps have been possible had the miracle that was Gandhi not occurred during this period. In fact, it was during this age that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most compelling themes: the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the down-trodden, the economically exploited, and the oppressed. (Naik 118)

One may also add to the list the name of R. K. Narayan who also projected Gandhi's influence in some of his works. (You will do well to read pp. 152-176 of Naik's book to have a thorough understanding of this period).

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) was the first notable Indian poet in English. His poems are suffused with romantic spirit. His major works are *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Kashiprasad Ghosh's *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* was published in 1830. Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *The Captive Ladie* (1849) and *Visions of the Past* (1849) are two significant works of the early period. A landmark in this genre – *The Dutt Family Album* – appeared in 1870. This "collection of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers – Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece [sic.] Chunder, and their cousin, Omesh Chunder" is in fact "the only instance of a family anthology in Indian English poetry" (Naik 36). Toru Dutt whose volumes of poetry *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* appeared in 1876 and 1882 respectively is one who helped 'graduating' Indian English poetry 'from imitation to authenticity' (Naik 37). Sri Aurobindo who had a long poetic career is perhaps best known for *Savitri*, his epic poem of 23,813 lines. We may also mention Sarojini Naidu and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya as notable poets of the period.

The list of the poets, novelists and playwrights mentioned above is not exhaustive. There were many other poets and prose writers who wrote in different genres during the colonial period. It is not possible to mention all of them here. You need to consult any authentic book on the history of Indian Writing in English to map the field properly.

Activities:

1. See page no. 6 of the Introduction in *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* (edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra) which is usually available in any academic library. He has quoted from Lal Behari Day's chapter on "English Education in Calcutta before 1834" included in *Recollections of My School-days*. The extract gives us an idea of how English was learnt in the villages of Bengal. Form your own opinion about the excitement that language created at that time by reading the extract.
2. What is a futuristic novel? What is a speculative novel? Consult relevant sources to define the genre/s and give appropriate examples.
3. Who are the 'triumvirate' of Indian English novels?
4. Some narratives written in English by Indians on the Sepoy Mutiny contested British colonialism. Consult relevant sources and mention some related works.
5. The Dutt family of Calcutta produced some very prominent literary figures who wrote in English. Prepare a list of the figures and try to make a family tree.
6. Consult relevant sources and write short notes on the following:

Lal Behari Day, Cavelly Venkata Boria, Krupabai Satthianadhan, *Rajmohan's Wife*, Young Bengal Movement

1.3.7 Summing Up

It is evident from the above discussion that there had been a linguistic and cultural dialogue between the English and the Indians during the early years of British colinialism. It culminated in the birth of English-educated Indians even before the formal introduction of English education in 1835. Private and missionary educational institutes like Sherbourne Academy (where Rammohan Ray got his early education) and Drummond's Academy (where Henry Derozio was educated) provided English education well before Macaulay's "Minutes." Although initially some Indians tended to ape English culture and even literature uncritically, gradually there grew a group of critical thinkers and creative writers who produced a significant number of truly creative works. Soon, Indian writers in English found their authentic voices and contributed to the development of what is known as Indian Writing in English today.

1.3.8 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-Answer Type Questions

1. Write a critical essay on the gradual spread of English language and culture in India and how it gave birth to a new class of Indian middle-class intellectuals and creative writers.
2. Analyse the nature of Anglicist-Orientalist Debate and comment critically on Macaulay's "Minute on Education."
3. "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Give your considered opinion on the ideological aspects evident in the above extract taken from Macaulay's "Minute." In this respect also refer to the opinions of other colonial administrators and intellectuals.
4. Write a critical essay on the birth and growth of Indian Writing in English during the colonial period.
5. Trace the development of anti-colonial narratives by Indians in English. Discuss two such narratives.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Define the term 'baboo' and explain why the typology of 'baboo' was in vogue both in Indian and British literature during the colonial period.
2. Write a note on Raja Rammohan Ray's *Letter on Indian Education*.
3. Write a note on "Minutes on Education."

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. Which is the first Indian work written in English?
2. Who wrote the first fictional work in Indian English? Mention the title of the work.
3. Who wrote the first Indian English play? Mention the title of the work.
4. What does the term 'Bengali *bhadralok*' mean?
5. Who is James Mill?
6. Who made the following comment: "many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming establishment of education of their children in a liberal manner"? To whom was it said?

1.3.9 Suggested Readings

Bagchi, Jasodhara. "Shakespeare in Loin Cloths: English Literature and the Early Nationalist Consciousness in Bengal." *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language.* Ed. Svati Joshi. Delhi: OUP, 1994. 146-159.

Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English.* 1962. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1985.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. "Minute on Education" (1835).

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay txt_minute_education_1835.html

Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna, ed. Introduction. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 1-26.

Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. "Translation, Colonialism and the Rise of English." *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language*. Ed. Svati Joshi. Delhi: OUP, 1994. 124-45.

Unit - 4 ❐ Indian Writing in English: The Post-Colonial Period

Structure

1.4.1. Objectives

This unit will try to discuss the post-colonial socio-cultural and political background and map the developments of Indian Writings in English against this background. Significant political events such as Partition of India (1947) and the imposition of Emergency (1984) had a significant impact on the lived experience of common people and gave birth to significant number of creative works, specially novels. This unit will try to capture the trajectory of history that produced such literary works.

1.4.2. Introduction

When we look back at the history of the English language in India and of Indian Writings in English from the vantage point of our location in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we wonder at the speed with which English developed to be one of the many languages of regular use in India. Indian Writings in English too has attained its present status as a genre over a period, and Indians writing in English have gained recognition across the world. M.K. Naik underlines the positive reception of the post-independence Indian Writing in English when he says:

> It is possible to argue that the rightful assumption of a recognised national identity after 1947 has proved a great gain for the Indian English writer. It has given him greater self-confidence, widened his vision and sharpened his faculty of self-scrutiny…. Interest in Indian English Literature has grown tremendously both in India and abroad, thus making possible a much larger readership than it could claim at any time earlier. (191)

In fact, Indian English writers, located in India and the diaspora, such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri have won prestigious awards and are being read all over the world now. Many of them have been included in the literature syllabi and are being taught both in India and abroad.

However, this does not mean that this progress was smooth. In the early decades after the Indian independence, the desirability of Indians writing creative works in English was hotly contested. For example, Buddhadev Bose, who felt that Indians could not produce creative works of good quality, remarked, "Indo-Anglian poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere" (qtd. in Beluau 1). In his Introduction to the anthology *Modern Indian Poetry: An Anthology and a Credo* (1969) P. Lal vehemently criticised Bose's observation quoted above and tried to establish that they indeed can write well in English. In an essay titled "Indian Writing in English" P. Lal similarly refuted Jyotirmoy Datta's 'broadside against Indians writing creatively in English' (9). In this essay Lal referred to an earlier comment of his own: "Only the Indian writing in English can hope to attain the Indian flavour which is a cosmopolitan flavour" (14). This offers this branch of 'Indian' literature a wider scope of depicting the multi-ethnic, pan-Indian scenario as no other Bhasha literature can. In *Indian Writing in English: Is There Any worth in It?* (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1976). T. V. Subba Rao made the following comment:

> Our writing in English is produced under *three conditions* which invalidate its claim to the rank of literature. The authors and the reading public, *having no spoken English to draw upon*, stand in *a false relation* to the English language; secondly, they *stand apart from our life and interests* with superior or indifferent attitude; thirdly, by limitations in point of *their command of English*, the authors scarcely transcend reporting, stating, and describing, or they can never achieve freedom completely from affectations and incapacities. These limiting factors will always be there for our authors in English. (qtd. in Gupta 173; emphases added)

Gupta asserts that the idea that "one can write better in one's mother tongue" is a myth. He refers to "examples of people writing and writing well in languages other than their mother tongues: Conrad, Yeats, Synge, Becket, and several others" (Gupta 175). P. Lal too observes that "[m]any factors combine to make [a writer] write in the language he does write in. Zofia Ilinska is Polish, but writes in English. Koestler writes only in English now, though he is Hungarian; and Nobokov's decision is another on the list" (18). He feels that our concern should be on the quality of the work, and "not the hows and whys of the choice" (Lal 18).

As oppositions to creative use of English appeared in cycles, they were ably refuted by groups of critics and creative writers. Gupta refers to the opinion of R.K. Narayan who made the following comment:

> English has been with us for over a century and a half. I am particularly fond of the language. I was never aware that I was using a different, foreign language when I wrote in English, because it came to me very easily . . . English is a very adaptable language. And it is so transparent it can take on the tint of any country. (qtd. in Gupta 175)

Kamala Das's oft-quoted lines are perhaps the strongest defence of the use of English for creative purpose. English indeed has become a language of expression of one's own emotion and ideas:

> Don't write in English, they said,
> English is not your mother tongue. Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like? (Das 272)

Then Das gets down to underline the naturalness of the language for her expressive purpose, she can use it spontaneously to give vent to her feelings and ideas. To convey this sense of naturalness and spontaneity, she uses two similes: cawing of the crows, and roaring of the lions. Cawing and roaring come naturally to these two species; they require no promptings to produce the sounds. Note how Das traces the inalienable link between her own expressive self and her use of the language:

> The language I speak
> Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
> All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
> Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
> It is as human as I am human, don't
> You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
> Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
> Is to crows or roaring to lions… (272)

In the field of critical writings too, innumerable articles and books are being published today by Indians. Vasant A Shahane notes the profusion of M.Phil. and Ph.D. theses as the outcome of academic exercises. He observes, "The chartered streets of Indo-English writing have now been frequented by almost a crowd; in fact, there may be a stampede accelerated by M. Phil, and Ph.D. aspirants. The pendulum has now swung to the other extreme, which neither the Iyengars nor the Narasimhaiahs of the earlier phase could

have predicted as the dark dust of their critical fall-out" (207). He refers to Meenakshi Mukherjee's comment which reads like this: "Of late this area has become a fertile and indiscriminate quarry for dissertation material. There seem to be more researchers than creative writers in the field" (qtd. in Shahane 207). Given such a situation, we can hardly need to talk about the 'foreignness' of the English language. For all practical purposes, English has become an Indian language, one of the many languages of the country.

1.4.3. Anxiety of Indianness and Indian Writing in English

Even while the debates about whether or not to produce creative works in English continued, the Indian Writing in English as a branch of literature was plagued by another issue related to how to preserve 'Indianness' in Indian Writing in English. Despite being an ambiguous idea, it was invoked again and again by a section of writers and critics. Meenakshi Mukherjee appropriately terms this syndrome 'an anxiety of Indianness.' This anxiety had indeed been part and parcel of the identity issue of the Indians who had staked their claim to a foreign, and more importantly, an invader's, language but were unsure about whether this would impinge on their Indian identity. Indeed, preserving 'Indianness' had been a continued concern of the Indian creative and critical writers for quite a long period.

For a multilingual and multi-ethnic country like India, national identity may be a contentious issue. But the all-important question is: what is this 'Indianness'? Shahane asserts, "The Indianness of Indian literatures is either a storehouse of significant recorded values or, alternatively, it is a free field for *highly individualistic critical guesswork based on the stock images of Indian culture*" (205). These stock images were recalled repeatedly by creative writers so much so that they amounted to mere cliches. Shahane refers to Niharranjan Ray, an authority on Indian culture, who had underlined the unreality of the "Romantic View of India" (qtd. in Shahane 205) Referring to Ray, Shahane tries to underline the assumed features of an 'eternal' India:

> There is, he says, the image of a mystical, metaphysical India "engrossed in the quest of the nature of the soul" in disregard of the inevitable demands of material life. India has also been portrayed as a country of epic heroism and romantic pageantry, of sylvan solitudes in farms and forests of great scenic beauty. It is also said to be a land of "Sadhus" and "Sanyasis", "Swamis" and "Gurus", unconcerned with the mundane chores of life. Max Mueller and other Orientalists strengthened the myth of India as a "nation of philosophers" (which it notably never was) "engaged in spiritual quest." … Another totally misconceived stock image of Indian culture

> propounded by Indologists is of the "unchanging India," which, even in modern times, has come to be linked with "tradition." This apparent "changelessness" of Indian civilization is another instance of the tendency towards developing "stock images" of Indian culture. (Shahane 205-6)

Shahane argues that these images are at the most "half-truths lacking historical accuracy." According to him, "any concept of Indian culture and civilization based on them is likely a half-truth, if not far from truth" (Shahane 205-6). He emphasises that "[t]his view emanating from the stock images of Indian culture through the ages has not taken into account the fact that temples and images of Konarak and Khajuraho could not have been built without a sound knowledge of engineering and architecture, and that color chemistry must have been an essential requirement of the Ajanta cave frescoes" (206). This aspect is ignored entirely in order to highlight the stereotyped aspects of the Indian reality.

Meenakshi Mukherjee explains the reason for overemphasising 'Indianness' in the following manner:

> Indian writers in English and their critics have been absorbed far too long in the fact that English is not an indigenous language and therefore, ways and means have to be devised to assert the Indianness of whatever is written in English. Fortunately, in the novels, short stories and poems published of late this obsession does not seem too evident. (Mukherjee 103)

It is high time that we should *stop* considering English as a foreign language and use it self-consciously. "After thirty years of use in independent India it is time that the English language became a natural part of the Indian landscape, and if some writers use it less felicitously than the others, that is the situation, one can be sure, in Bengali, Marathi or any other Indian language" (Mukherjee 103).

Activities:

1. Please refer back to the earlier units of this module and recapitulate how the English language came to, and developed in, India.
2. Go to the appropriate sources to prepare a list of Indian English writers who won prestigious national and international awards during the last five decades.
3. Find out who Buddhadev Bose and P. Lal are. Write down their brief profiles.

1.4.4. Literary Works: Post-colonial period

The independence of India in 1947 created a sense of euphoria in the country. It generated the picture of an imagined nation characterised by a concept of welfare for all its citizens.

The euphoria is well represented by the 'midnight' speech to the nation by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India. The emotionally charged address had a permanent impact on the people and the word 'midnight' became a catchword. Such was its impact that it made into the common man's vocabulary and was even used in the titles of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1881) and Brij V. Lal's autobiographical book *On the Other Side of Midnight* (2005).

The euphoria generated by the newly acquired independence was, however, disrupted by the cataclysmic event of the Partition of India that accompanied it. The division of the country, as you can imagine, brought in its train untold sufferings for the common people. The history of inter-communal amity and of participatory socio-cultural life that prevailed in the country for a long time was interrupted in the face of communal intolerance and violent riots. Thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims died, women were abducted and raped. Innumerable people were displaced from the lands they lived for generations. These displaced people looked upon the newly drawn borderlines as fuzzy and shadowy. The unprecedented nature of the refugee problem landed both the nations in deep crisis. This socio-political context gave rise to a significant number of fictional works, mainly short stories and novels, written in both English and regional languages. Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) are two of the early works on the Partition of India. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, written later (1988), can also be mentioned.

India was further jolted by its war with China in 1962 and three more wars with Pakistan – in 1965 ('seventeen-day war'), 1971 (that led to the creation of Bangladesh) and 1999 (known as Kargil War). The war with China generated a severe anti-Chinese sentiment which resulted in the incarceration (or imprisonment) of a large number of Chinese Indians. This event has given birth to some short stories included in *The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories* (2006) written by Kwai-yun Li, a Chinese Indian writer who later migrated to Canada. This is also the central theme of an Assamese novel *Makum* (2010) written by Rita Chowdhury. *Makum* was later translated into English and published by Macmillan as *Chinatown Days* (2018). Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi writer of Pakistani descent, wrote a captivating story titled "A Gentlemanly War" which is set in Pakistan against the backdrop of the 'seventeen-day war' (Indo-Pakistan War of 1965). Similarly, Jhumpa Lahiri's memorable story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" narrates the anxiety of a Bengali research scholar hailing from East Pakistan on a short academic tour to the United States. He loses all connections with his family left behind in Dhaka as the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war/Bangladeshi War for Independence had been raging at the background.

A Golden Age (2007) by Tahmima Anam, a diasporic author of Bangladeshi origin, deals with the 1971 war more elaborately although the main focus is on Bangladesh freedom movement. The Bangladeshi war of independence also created a sense of *bonhomie* between the two Bengals (West Bengal, now in India and East Bengal, now Bangladesh) in particular and the two nations – India and Bangladesh – in general. The presence of real and imagined lines between the two nations constitutes the subject matter of many post-colonial literary works published both in English and regional languages. Asif Currimbhoy's three plays known as Bengal trilogy *Inquilab* (1970), *The Refugee* (1971), *Sonar Bangla* (1972) bear testimony to this.

The declaration of a state of emergency in 1975 by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, brought a severe crisis in the national life as democratic values were compromised. The right to free speech and opinion was severely hampered. Thousands of political activists, journalists and free-thinking intellectuals were imprisoned. Shashi Tharoor's novel *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) modelled on the great Indian epic Mahabharata, is an allegorical representation of India leading up to the imposition of Emergency. It is a caustic comment on the dynamics of power politics. The rise of Sikh extremism and the murder of Indira Gandhi followed by anti-Sikh riots dealt a severe blow to the image of India as a unified, multicultural nation.

In the recent decades the neo-liberal policies and economic globalisation, accompanied by unforeseen technological advancement and development of media, including the virtual ones, have changed the overall worldview of Indians who are still caught between strong pulls of old traditions and neoliberal and consumerist norms of modern India. Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) depicts this neo-liberal India. We also take note of a steady flow of literary works from the marginal spaces of Kashmir and the Northeast of India now.

If we survey the postcolonial Indian English literature and try to prepare a catalogue of the authors, we will find that it has been enriched by the contribution of a plethora of talented literary figures. G.V. Desani published his experimental novel *All About H. Hatterr in* 1948. It may be considered as the forerunner of Salman Rushdie's novels such as *The Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983). Rushdie too experimented with the form and style of his novels. The 'triumvirate' of Indian Writings in English continued to contribute to the genre after India won independence. Works like Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and Comrade Kirillov (1976), R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), and Mulk Raj Anand's The *Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953)* were published during this period. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonker and Khuswant Singh

emerged as important novelists of the 1950s and 1960s. A host of women authors too emerged. Mention may be made of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. Notable poets also appeared at the scene. Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, A. K. Ramanujam, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, and Kamala Das are some of the major poets of the post-independence period. Asif Currimbhoy, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurucharan Das, Girish Karnad, Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani are the most prominent playwrights to appear after independence.

At the present moment Indian Writings in English as a genre is standing at the crossroads of nationalism and internationalism as more and more authors are taking up themes for literary treatment that cater to both the national and international readers. As students of this relatively new branch of literature we are waiting to see how Indian Writing in English will shape up in near future.

Activities:

1. Name some prominent fictional works and films on the theme of Partition (other than those mentioned in the above discussion). Include in your list well-known novelists and short story writers in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and of course English. And also mention a novel on the theme written by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani Parsi writer – the book has been made into a film.
2. Consult relevant sources to mention some literary works that depict the new socio-cultural reality of neo-liberal India.
3. Collect information about the following literary works and write brief notes on them: *The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories*, *Makum*, *Chinatown Days*, *The White Tiger*, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine".
4. Briefly explain the impact of Jawaharlal Nehru's 'midnight' speech on the Indian English literary scene.

1.4.5. Summing Up

A perusal of the discussion presented above establishes the fact that English has become a language of expression of ideas and personal feelings in India and that Indian Writing in English has certainly attained maturity by now. We have crossed the period of uncertainty about our capacity to produce good literary works. We, therefore, need not experience any anxiety about Indianness at the present moment. Each of the important historical incidents taking place after Indian independence in 1947 has helped the production of

good literary crops. Many authors writing either from India or the diaspora have attained worldwide reputation. Indian Writing in English indeed has a bright future.

1.4.6. Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. How did critics and creative writers defend against the argument that Indians cannot write creative works in English? Show how the argument that "one can write better in one's mother tongue" is a myth.
2. Analyse what is meant by the expression 'anxiety of Indianness.' How will you argue that it should not have any relevance in the present-day use of English by creative authors? (Take help of Meenakshi Mukherjee's essay "Anxiety of Indianness" included in your syllabus)
3. How will you analyse the concept of 'Indianness'? What are the 'stock images' that are associated with the concept? How does the stereotyped images of India affect literary representations?
4. Write an essay on post-colonial Indian Writings in English.
5. Who are the poets/novelists/non-fictional writers who wrote on the Emergency of India?

Middle-length Answer Type Questions

1. Explain what Buddhadev Bose means when he observes, "'Indo-Anglian' poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere."

2. Explain the following comment made by P. Lal: "Only the Indian writing in English can hope to attain the Indian flavour which is a cosmopolitan flavour."

3. What are the three conditions mentioned by T. V. Subba Rao which, according to him, prevent Indians from writing creative works properly?
4. Which plays of Asif Currimbhoy constitute the 'Bengal trilogy'? Make brief critical comments on its main theme**.**
5. Write short notes on:

   Tahmima Anam, Asif Currimbhoy, Salman Rushdie, Nissim Ezekiel, Manjula Padmanabhan, *All About H. Hatterr, The Great Indian Novel.*

Short-answer Type Questions

1. What do you mean by **'**Bhasha literature'?

2. Mention how R.K. Narayan and Kamala Das defended the use of English by Indians in creative writings.
3. Who are the 'triumvirate' of Indian Writings in English?
4. Name some of the post-colonial Indian women writers.
5. Consult relevant sources and prepare two separate lists of novelists and poets from Kashmir and the Northeast of India.

1.4.7 Suggested Readings

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Notes

Notes

Module - 2

Reading Indian English Poetry

Unit - 5 ❒ Emergence and Development of Indian English Poetry

Structure

2.5.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to trace the growth and development of Indian English Poetry. Since its inception, this genre has evolved in a fascinating manner, continuously changing its generic features through innovation and experimentation. This unit will acquaint the learners with the major Indian English poets and their works.

2.5.2 Introduction

Among all the genres of Indian English Literature, poetry is perhaps the most important, because the first representation of Indian Writing in English appeared in the form of poems written by the indigenous intellectuals who were highly influenced by the form and content of British poetry. Since the beginning of nineteenth century, Indian English Poetry began its journey, and with it, the two other literary genres, Indian English Drama and Indian English Novel, also emerged, but the major contributions of the Indian writers till the second decade of the twentieth century appeared mainly in the field of poetry. This unit will exclusively deal with the emergence and development of these genres from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the year 1980.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of the early Indian English poets. Who among them were significant poets?
2. What may be reasons for the significant rise of Indian English poetry in the pre-independence era?

2.5.3 Pre-independence Indian English Poetry

Indian English Poetry is the first to gain a prominent space in Indian English literature. The reason for this may be attributed to the revolutionary spirit present in the English Romantic poetry which influenced the Indian poets of the nineteenth century to articulate their nationalistic zeal in a language that reflects their acquaintance with the great English Romantic poets. During the first half of the nineteenth century, English Romantic poetry made a big impact on the minds of the budding Indian poets, who were, at that point of time, searching for an appropriate idiom to express their love for nation. The first Indian English poet, who was highly influenced by the Byronic spirit, and who also attempted to infuse the minds of the young students with liberal views of the West, was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831). As a lecturer in the Hindu College, Calcutta, Derozio made a conscious effort to trigger "the imagination of many a students" through his "fearless spirit of inquiry, his passion for ideas, his reformistic idealism and his romantic enthusiasm" (Naik 22). His reputation as a poet rests on the two volumes of poetry that he published while teaching in the Hindu College: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Along with Derozio, the two other important contemporary poets are, Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873) and Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). Kashiprasad Ghose is well known for his volume of verse titled, *The Shairor Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830). In his poetry, as Naik notes, there is peculiar blending of three distinctive traditions of English poetry: "Kashiprasad Ghose seems to intimate by turns the stylized love-lyrics of the Cavalier poets, the moralizing note in neo-classical poetry and the British romantics…" (Naik 24). Michael Madhusudan Dutt, apart from writing a few sonnets, mainly wrote two longs poems which explicitly reflect his indebtedness to three English poets: Scott, Byron and Milton. Dutt's *The Captive Ladie* (1849) and *Visions of the Past* (1849) illustrate his complete mastery of the English language and poetic rhythm.

Derozio, Ghose and Dutt are three significant poets whose works define the nature of Indian English Poetry in the first half of nineteenth century. As evident in the above discussion, their poems are derivative in nature. In their attempts to follow the form and technique of English Romantic poetry, these poets forgot to create an indigenous mode of expression that would have enriched the vocabulary of native English tradition. When we move to the second half of the nineteenth century, Indian English Poetry seems to overcome the difficulty of finding an appropriate Indian idiom of expressing emotions in poetry. In the post-1850s era, Toru Dutt was the first poet to emphasise authenticity by ignoring the imitative model of writing poetry. While introducing Toru Dutt as a poet,

Rosinka Chaudhuri states, "Arguably the first modern Indian poet in English, she brought the personal and cultural dimensions of her experience into her writing" (65). The 'modern' aspect that Chaudhuri finds in Toru Dutt's poetry is reflected in her use of the English language. Instead of imitating the language of the English poets, Dutt attempts to write in a language that shows her desire to create an individual mode of expression. In her poetry, Dutt uses ancient mythical and legendary characters like Sita, Savitri, Dhruva, Sindhu and Prehlad to rewrite the histories of these characters from different perspectives. Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) is a posthumously published work in which the western ballad form is used to narrate the tales of ancient legendary figures of India. Though the Western Romantic spirit is quite strong in her poetry, Dutt in her own way has attempted to create an idiom of expression that reflects her desire to produce an Indian sensibility in the field of Indian English Poetry. Dutt's contemporary, Manmohan Ghose was an important poetic figure. Ghose studied at Oxford University where he developed an interest in Western classical literature (Naik 44). This interest ultimately led him to write poems that define his strong connection with England. *Primavera* (1890) is a collection of poems written by Ghose. This collection, which also includes the work of Stephen Phillips, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Cripps (Naik 45), shows Ghose's attachment with the English soil and also his admiration for the great English poets. Thus, Ghose's poetry is 'imitative' in form and spirit as he tries hard to follow the English "mood of world-weariness and yearning and colourful aestheticism of the Eighteen Nineties" (Naik 45). Unlike Manmohan Ghose, his younger brother, Aurobindo Ghose is a 'striking contrast' (Naik 47). Aurobindo Ghose went to Cambridge University to complete his higher studies and after returning to India, he became interested in Indian culture and philosophy. Unlike his elder brother, who could not think beyond his love for English culture, Aurobindo Ghose's career as poet shows a considerable development. Naik finely sums up this difference in attitude of both the brothers, "Manmohan's career is a sad story of arrested artistic development; Sri Aurobindo's, a glorious chronicle of progress from patriot to poet, yogi and seer" (47). Sri Aurobindo wrote poems of various kinds, but his magnum opus is the poem *Savitri*. This poem is epical in theme and spirit, and it also contains Sri Aurobindo's spiritual insights into the complex relationship between the human and the divine worlds. Sri Aurobindo's concern for the Hindu spiritual philosophy makes him an 'authentic' poet like Toru Dutt, who in her own way, had also dealt with the Hindu myths and legends. Though they both use the Western form of writing poetry – Dutt uses the English ballad form and Sri Aurobindo imitates the Miltonic epic form – yet they are original poets because they make serious attempts to foreground Hindu culture, myths and philosophy in their writings. Another significant poet, who happens

to be a contemporary of Sri Aurobindo is Sarojini Naidu. Sarojini Naidu, like Sri Aurobindo and Manmohan Ghose, went to England for studying in London and Cambridge (Naik 66). When she was in England, her "poetic talent developed under the influence of the Rhymers' Club and the encouragement given by Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse" (Naik 66). In fact, Gosse advised Naidu to write about "the mountains, the gardens, the temples," so that she may become "a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever, machine-made imitator of English classics" (qtd. in Naik 66). This advice seems to have influenced Naidu so much that she ultimately became a nature poet representing the various shades of Indian landscape. Though the English Romantic tradition strongly influenced her writings, she made attempts to study the different moods of nature from her own viewpoint, which obviously rooted her poems in the Indian culture and tradition. Like Dutt, she too tried to represent the Indian myths and legends in her poetry. Naidu wrote three volumes of poetry: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). In her poetry, Naidu achieves a perfect balance between 'imitation' and 'authenticity.' It is true that she imitates the style of the English Romantics, but the themes of her poems are truly Indian. Sarojini Naidu is the last among the poets who wrote during the pre-independence period.

Thus, Indian English poetry during the pre-independence era mainly struggled to find an authentic mode of expression. Poets like Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu made sincere efforts to incorporate indigenous cultural idioms in their poems, which obviously foreground their tendency to produce 'authentic' poetry. However, they could not completely shed off the influence of English Romanticism, because their style shows their concern for imitating the model of the English Romantic poets. In fact, this conflict between 'authenticity' and 'imitation' is the defining phenomenon of Indian English Poetry of this phase. Apart from the three poets mentioned above, the other two poets of this period, Derozio and Manmohan Ghose, were evidently 'imitative' of the great Romantic poets of England.

2.5.4 Post-independence Indian English Poetry (1947-1980)

The post-independence Indian English Poetry (1947-1980) can be divided into three different decades: poetry of the 1950s, poetry of the 1960s and the poetry of the 1970s. This classification is clearly mentioned by Naik in the chapter titled "The Asoka Pillar: Independence and After." Indian English Poetry in the post-independence era turned away from the models of English Romanticism by incorporating a 'newness' which was derived from the English modernism: "In the fifties arose a school of poets who tried to

turn their backs on the romantic tradition and write a verse more in tune with the age .... They tried, with varying degrees of success, to naturalize in the Indian soil the modernistic elements derived from the poetic revolution effected by T. S. Eliot and others in the twentieth century British and American poetry" (Naik 192). Thus, this shift in perspective is remarkable as most of the poets of the 1950s felt a need to experiment with poetic language and theme. This new breed of poetry is designated as the 'new poetry' by Naik (193). He further draws our attention to the founding of the Writers Workshop in Calcutta by P. Lal and his associates in 1958, which "became an effective forum for modernist poetry" (Naik 193). P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao edited the first modernist anthology, *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1958), which emphatically claimed to promote modernist trends in poetry by indulging in 'experimentation,' by emphasising the 'need for the private voice' and by showing faith in 'a vital language' (Naik 193). Hence, the spirit of English modernism influenced the poets of the post-independence era, but this did not make them slavish imitators of the English modern poets. They attempted to create their own perspectives of modernism suited to the Indian locale and lifestyle. The first distinct poet of this 'new' generation is Nissim Ezekiel. In Ezekiel's poems, the lives of the common people of India are represented. Their pains and struggles are the themes of his poetry. While making an attempt to represent the contemporary scenario of modern India, Ezekiel presents the lonely and alienated characters of urban India, who are utterly frustrated by the failures in their lives. Thus, the themes of alienation, frustration, failure and suffering are distinctively present in Ezekiel's poetry. In fact, his poetry reflects a bleak version of modernism which lacks any positive message. Another 'new' poet who became famous in the 1950s is Dom Moraes. Moraes (1938-2004) is more English as a poet than Indian. His love for the English culture is the outcome of his long periods of stay in England which made him realise that he is a misfit in the Indian culture: "So English was my outlook, I found I could not fit in India. When eventually I came to England, I fitted in at once" (qtd. in Naik 196). Moraes's was "influenced by Dylan Thomas and the surrealistic school" and his poetry is "highly personal" (Naik 196). Moraes's poetry presents the theme of alienation, and there is also a note of escapism which often leads the readers to the haunted world of supernaturalism (Naik 196). Use of Christian myths and classical allusions are quite common in his poetry (Naik 196). Thus, compared to Ezekiel, Moraes's poetry does not reflect the Indian ethos. After Ezekiel and Moraes, the 'new' poets who became famous in the 1960s are: Purushottam Lal, Adil Jussawalla, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. These poets consciously represent the modern conditions of human life by using images and symbols that often are mythical in nature. In P. Lal's poetry, the contemporary social reality is represented

through the sorrowful images of city life (Naik 198). His book of poetry, *The Man of the Dharma and the Rasa of Silence* contextualises the mythical figure of Yudhisthira into the modern Indian scenario (Naik 198). Adil Jussawala's poems contain the perspective of an exile (Naik 199). After staying in England for more than a decade, when he returned to India, his exilic experience, his awareness of the Indian roots, and his search for self-knowledge became important traits of his poetry: "The exile's return, his recapitulation of his foreign experience, his reaction to his native scene and his continued quest for self-knowledge form the chief themes" of his poetry. (Naik 199). Like P. Lal, Jussawala also uses Indian myths, but Jussawala intends to juxtapose European myths with the Indian (Naik 199). Though remarkably different in their respective approaches to Indian myths, they both use the mythical figures to define the contemporary social reality. A. K. Ramanujan, like Jussawala, is a poet who narrates his exilic experience. As a poet, Ramanujan claims to bear an 'outer' form which is English, and the 'inner' form which is Hindu (Naik 200). The confluence between two cultures is a remarkable trait of Ramanujan's poetry. His poems often present sordid images of city life which are alien to the Indian conditions, but these images carry the burden of his Hindu heritage. Naik explains this phenomenon by referring to the poem "Christmas" in which the impossibility of knowing "leaf from parrot / Or branch from root / Nor ... that tree / From you or me" is beautifully expressed by Ramanujan (200). Like Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy also deals with the complex relationship between the English culture that he imbibed during his long stay in England and his original Tamil heritage (Naik 202). His poetry claims to foreground the reconciliation of these two dissimilar cultural idioms: "English forms a part of my intellectual, rational make-up, Tamil of my emotional, psychic make-up... The situation itself is poetry" (qtd. in Naik 202-203). Thus, Parthasarathy's poetry contains the same 'outer'/'inner' binary that is traceable in Ramanujan' poetry. In fact, Parthasarathy's, *Rough Passage* (a poem which is divided into three sections) foregrounds the poet's effort to build a passage connecting the two cultures (English and Tamil) that define his identity. The three sections of the poem: "Exile," "Trial," and "Homecoming" deal with the experiences of his life. These sections capture the life of an artist, who, being in a state of exile, ultimately understands the importance of going back to the roots, and therefore returns to his homeland. The journey of an artist is metaphorically represented in *Rough Passage*. Naik observes that *Rough Passage* is "an evocative record of a highly sensitive Indian's personal peregrination, which is also an eventful journey within" (203). Gieve Patel, as a representative of the Parsi community, is often considered to be an 'outsider' (Naik 203). But, his poems do not reflect his lack of knowledge of the Indian ethos. In a poem like "Naryal Purnima," Patel displays his interest in Hindu customs

(Naik 204). Patel's poetry, as Naik remarks, "is mostly 'situational'" and "being a medical practitioner by profession" he looks at "pain, disease and death" from a clinically detached point of view (204). In a way, Patel's poetry captures the painful lives of the people living in modern India. His sympathy for the sufferers is revealed in his poems. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's poetic world consists of surrealistic images that define his perspective of writing poetry about universal feelings of love, hate and sex (Naik 204). Through his symbols and images, Mehrotra represents "the modern man's predicament in a world of debased values" (Naik 204). Thus, among the poets of the 1960s, Jussawalla, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy significantly deal with the theme of exile which is closely connected with their experiences of living in foreign locations. In their poems, India is represented from a diasporic perspective. Ramanujan and Parthasarathy engage with the idea of reconciling the opposing cultural forces which ultimately help to define their locational identity. P. Lal, Gieve Patel and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra represent the contemporary modern India from three different perspectives. Lal uses myths to describe the contemporary situation of India. Patel looks at the pathetic life of the Indians who are not happy with the scenario around them. Mehrotra uses a surrealistic point of view to represent the problematic world of the modern man.

During the 1970s, five poets emerged in the field of Indian English Poetry: K.N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar and Kamala Das (Naik 205). K. N. Daruwalla is a former Police officer and his poems therefore capture the experiences of a person who looks at the world from a detached observer's perspective. His poems are deeply realistic containing the elements of irony and satire. Naik notes that Daruwalla's poetry bears a distinctive trait of "modern scepticism tempered by a lively human curiosity" (206). Shiv K. Kumar has dealt with a variety of themes in his poetry. His poems are emotional and reflect the learning of the poet. Naik observes that he is a master of "both the confessional mode and ironic comment" (206). Jayanta Mahapatra is a poet who has mainly focused on the 'Orissa scene' (Naik 207). The characters in his poems are mostly in a tragic state of life. Mahapatra has a very keen eye to capture the pain, suffering, and worries of the people living in his part of India. While summing up his assessment of Mahapatra's poetic corpus, Rajeev S. Patke comments, "Mahapatra's poetic world is distinguished for the unyielding privacy of a resilient but amorphous inwardness" (266). Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) is a bilingual poet, writing both in English and Marathi (Naik 207). His reputation as a poet rests on his long poem, *Jejuri* (1976) for which he won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Naik 207). *Jejuri* is divided into thirty-one short sections describing "a visit to Jejuri, a famous temple near Pune" (Naik 207). This is a journey poem which contains the motif of quest (Naik 208). In fact, through this poem

Kolatkar attempts to foreground the inherent conflict between 'religious tradition' and 'machine civilization,' which is a defining phenomenon of the contemporary modern Indian culture (Naik 208). Among the poets of the 1970s, Kamala Das is a distinctive woman poet, who is known for her frank representation of sexuality. She is a confessional poet and her poetry captures the bitter experiences of her life. Her contribution to the field of Indian English Poetry is significant from the viewpoint of female psyche and body, which as a feature is pathbreaking. Rajeev S. Patke appreciates this stance of Das by stating: "Her poems struggle to develop a sense of self which is alternatively sustained and thwarted by her own sexuality, defined and disfigured as that is, in turn, by being trapped in the rut of social institutions" (252).

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of the pre-independence Indian English poets. What are the common features you find in their poetry?
2. Prepare a list of the important post-independence Indian English poets. What are the distinctive traits you find in the poetry of this period.
3. Read the poems written by Sarojini Naidu. Why do you think that she is different from the other poets of the pre-independence era?
4. Read some of the poems written by Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy. What are the basic themes that they deal with? Do you find any difference in their attitude to modern Indian scenario?
5. How is Jayanta Mahapatra, as a poet, different from Shiv K. Kumar?

2.5.5 Summing Up

This unit maps the history of the growth of Indian English Poetry from the colonial to the post-colonial period. This genre, as the discussion in this unit evidently manifests, gained momentum during the pre-independence era and it significantly achieved a distinct reputation in the post-independence period. Most of the Indian English poets are now internationally recognised figures and their poems are being published by globally reputed publishers.

2.5.6 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English poets. How have these poets enriched the genre of Indian English Poetry?

2. Critically analyse the poems written by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.
3. How did modernism influence the poets of the post-independence era? What are the distinctive modern traits in the English poetry of the post-independence period?

Mid-length Answer Type Questions

1. Describe briefly the distinctive features of Henry Derozio's poetry.
2. Explain briefly the features of the poetry of the 1970s.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Write a short note on Sri Aurobindo's poem "Savitri."
2. Briefly comment on the modernist features of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry.

2.5.7 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 6 ❑ Henry Derozio: “The Harp of India”; Toru Dutt: “Our Casuarina Tree”

Structure

2.6.1 Objectives

In this unit, we shall discuss two poems which have been included in your syllabus. The first poem is “The Harp of India” by Henry Derozio and the second one is “Our Casuarina Tree” by Toru Dutt. These poems are reflective of the excellent adoption of English verse, rhythm and tone by the Indian English poets. Indeed, the discussion in this unit shall highlight the fact that these poems are aesthetically English in spirit despite being culturally located in India.

2.6.2 Introduction

Literary writings in English by Indians, as we have seen in Module 1, began in earnest from the initial decades of the nineteenth century. These received a colonial impetus with the introduction of the language as part of the curriculum through the auspices of Lord Macaulay’s *Minutes on Education* in 1835. However, the history of Indian English poetry dates further back in time. Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami’s English translation in 1825 of “Viswagunadarsana,” a Sanskrit poem written by Arasinapala Venkatadhvarin in the early seventeenth century, is probably the first book of verse in English by an Indian, though it is not quite considered a part of Indian English literature owing to its vernacular roots. That honour is generally reserved for Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), despite his mixed ancestry. Even though his poetic career was brief due to

the tragic fact of his untimely death, its impact was long-lasting. His shorter lyrics were widely read, and inspired both his pupils as well as future poets. Derozio was soon to be followed by Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-73), the first English poet of pure Indian blood. His *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* published in 1830 has been termed as an attempt to imitate Walter Scott's 'minstrel'. His use of local materials like Hindu festivals in his lyrics (e.g. "The Boatman's Song to Ganga") indicates a sincere attempt to employ a native diction.

The next name that occupies an important place in the history of Indian English poetry is Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), although he became more famous later as a writer in Bengali. In addition to some sonnets and shorter pieces, he wrote two long poems in English: *The Captive Ladie* (1849) narrates the story of the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan, his Lochinvar-like abduction of the Kanouj king's daughter Sanyukta, and his unsuccessful battle with the Muslim invader Mohammad Ghori that resulted in his death. In *Visions of the Past* (1849), a poem in Miltonic blank verse, complete with weighty abstract diction and Latin inversions, Dutt handles the Christian theme of the temptation, fall and subsequent redemption of Man. Other poets of the mid-nineteenth century include Rajnarain Dutt who wrote a verse narrative in heroic couplets titled *Osmyn: An Arabian Tale* in 1841, as well as those who belonged to the wealthy and respected Dutt family of Calcutta. They were descendants of Rasomoy Dutt, who had been an associate of Rammohun Roy, and was also the secretary of the managing committees of both the Hindu College and the Sanskrit College. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Miscellaneous Poems* saw the light of day in 1848, while Hur Chunder Dutt's *Fugitive Pieces* came three years later. *The Dutt Family Album* published from London almost two decades later in 1870 marked the next phase in the growth and development of Indian poetry in English. This collection, the only instance of a family anthology in Indian English poetry, is comprised of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers – Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece [*sic*, an Anglicisation of Girish] Chunder as well as their cousin Omesh Chunder. Most of their poems manifested the chief characteristic feature of the Dutts, of writing in a Western persona, so that it was quite difficult to fix the identity of the poet as anything other than European or English. However, some did exhibit an abstract nationalism, common in English poetry by Indians in the nineteenth century, that contrasted India's 'glorious past' with its present degeneration [incidentally, it was the theme of Derozio's "The Harp of India" as well, to be discussed in detail in the next section]. Govin's daughter Toru Dutt was later to become the most famous of the entire clan, due largely to her memorable poems "Our Casuarina Tree" and "Baugmaree".

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), a cousin of Toru, continued the family's poetic tradition, though all his original creative work was in Bengali. He is better remembered today for his translations. *Lays of Ancient India* (1894) is a verse-collection rendered from Sanksrit and Prakrit classics including the *Rigveda*, the *Upanishads*, Kalidasa and Bharavi, and Buddisht scriptures like the *Dhammapada*. He also took up the ambitious task of producing a condensed version of the *Mahabharata* (1895) and the *Ramayana* (1899), where he employed the Tennysonian 'Locksley Hall' metre as the closest equivalent of the *Anustubh* or *sloka* of his originals. Nobo Kissen Ghosh (1837-1918) who used the pseudonym of Ram Sharma was another versatile poet showing glimpses of authenticity in his verses, namely *Willow Drops* (1873-74), *The Last Day: A Poem* (1886) and *Shiva Ratri, Bhagaboti Gita* and *Miscellaneous Poems* (1903). He marked a welcome change from many of his contemporaries whose works were, more often than not, derivative in nature.

Turning from Calcutta [modern-day Kolkata] to Bombay, we find Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) whose *The Indian Muse in English Garb*, comprising 32 poems, was published the same year as Toru Dutt's first collection. Cowasji Nowrosi Vesuvala, a fellow-Parsi, brought out *Courting the Muse* in 1879. There was a group of minor voices as well that included M. M. Kunte (*The Risi*, 1879) and Nagesh Wishwanath Pai (*The Angel of Misfortune: A Fairy Tale*, 1904). Nonetheless, Bengal remained the principal seat of literary activity even in the succeeding decades. Manmohan Ghose, who is today better remembered as the elder brother of Aurobindo Ghose (better known as Sri Aurobindo), spent a number of years in England and published his early poems in *Primavera* (1890) that also included the work of Stephen Phillips, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Cripps. His *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898), *Songs of Love and Death* (1926), *Orphic Mysteries* and *Immortal Eve* (both published in 1947 as part of his collected works) are now only of historical interest. Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) accompanied his brother to England at the age of seven, and started writing poetry soon after. His early *Short Poems* (1890-1900) are mostly minor verse characteristic of this period of the 'romantic twilight,' but *The Short Poems 1895-1908*, written after his return to India, shows signs of his later mysticism. In *Short Poems,1902-1930* and *Short Poems, 1930-1950*, he introduces a reflective and symbolic style. However, his *magnum opus* to which he devoted the major portion of his last years is *Savitri*. It is a narrative poem of 24,000 lines that recounts the *Mahabharata* tale of Satyavan and his wife Savitri who saved her husband's life from the clutches of Death. In this tri-partite, twelve-book epic, he attempted to 'catch something of the Upanishadic movement so far as that is possible in English' (Parthasarathy 2), even though the work has been subsequently criticised for being devoid of much substance.

An illustrious contemporary of Sri Aurobindo is Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who played the multiple roles of poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer, composer, painter, thinker, educationist, nationalist and internationalist with ease. He primarily wrote in Bengali, but started translating some of his poems into English from 1912 when the first collection titled *Gitanjali* came out. The book was hailed by William Rothenstein and W. B. Yeats, and it also won him the Nobel Prize for literature the next year. His other poetical works in English include *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift and Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928) and the posthumously published *Poems* (1942).

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was younger to both Tagore and Aurobindo, but she gained recognition abroad much earlier. She studied in London and Cambridge for three years; her poetic talent developed under the influence of the Rhymers' Club. In her creative efforts she was encouraged by Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse. Her first volume of poetry, *The Golden Threshold* (1905) was followed by *The Birds of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Her collected poems appeared in *The Sceptered Flute* (1946), while *Feather of the Dawn*, a lyric anthology written in 1927, was published posthumously in 1961. She had 'perhaps the finest ear among Indian poets for the sound of English' (Parthasarathy 2). Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1990), her younger brother, also wrote poetry in the romantic mould. He was more prolific than his sister and produced numerous volumes of verse, including *The Feast of Youth* (1918), *The Magic Tree* (1922), *Poems and Plays* (1927), *Spring in Winter* (1955) and *Virgins and Vineyards* (1967).

2.6.3 Derozio's Life and His Works

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born in Calcutta on 18 April, 1809 of an Indian mother and a Portuguese father. He was appointed a teacher at Hindu College [later to become Presidency College, and subsequently Presidency University] in 1826, and taught poetry. He inspired his pupils to explore the reaches of not just literature and philosophy but also free thought and nationalism, although this was not taken too kindly by either the orthodox Hindu founders of the college or the colonial establishment. He was eventually compelled to resign in 1831. He was at the forefront of the 'Young Bengal' movement and tried to apply his secular Western notions of behaviour, but they were deemed as too radical, posing a threat to the existing conservative views in India. He was undoubtedly influenced by the English Romantics, particularly Byron, Scott, Shelley and Keats. In his brief writing career, he published two volumes of poetry: *Poems* in 1827, and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* the following year. *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale* is a narrative poem which tells the tragic story of the

Brahmin widow Nuleeni who was rescued by a 'bandit-fakeer' from being burnt on the funeral pyre, and whose love she returns. Her relatives, however, resent this and in the ensuing conflict, the lover is killed and is finally united in death with the heart-broken Nuleeni. The narrative is comprised of rich descriptions replete with the sights, sounds and fragrances of the region around Bhagalpur where Derozio had spent a short period while working for his uncle before returning to Calcutta. This, along with Derozio's satirical verses like "Don Juanics", clearly indicates his special affinity with Byron, and gives evidence of energy and vigour as in the lines: 'That sponging is the best of all resources/ For all who have no money in their purses' (qtd. in Naik 24). He had a number of sonnets and short lyrics to his credit, manifesting a strong influence of English romantic poets in theme and some traces of neo-classicism in sentiment, imagery and diction, for example "Sonnet: To The Moon"; "The Golden Vase" and "Sonnet: Death, My Best Friend." In the last named one he calls Death his 'best friend' and proclaims his victory over fate: 'O tyrant fate! thus shall I vanquish thee,/ for out of suffering shall I gather pleasure' (qtd. in Ramamurti 75). Unfortunately, these lines turned out to be too prophetic, for Derozio died from cholera on 26 December 1831 at the age of only twenty-one.

2.6.4 "The Harp of India" (Text)

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

(Paranjape 28)

A harp is a musical instrument consisting of a triangular frame formed by a soundbox, a pillar, and a curved neck. Closely resembling the Greek lyre, it has strings stretched between the soundbox and the neck that are plucked with the fingers to play and produce musical tunes.

2.6.5 Critical Understanding of the Text

"The Harp of India" is one of Derozio's best known sonnets. It is reminiscent of the Irish poet Thomas Moore's ''Harp of Erin''. His dear India which he has apostrophized in another sonnet "To India–My Native Land" as a deity worshipped by everyone is presented here in the metaphor of a harp. This harp now lies lonely and abandoned, bound by silence for want of talent. The poet is pained at the fact that this harp which had, at one point of time, created such mellifluous music is currently lying unused, in a state of waste. In a series of images, the harp is pictured as one whose music had been brought out by many worthy hands in its hey-days. Those who had plucked its strings in the past had won many laurels but they are no more. If poor mortal hands such as the poet's own can awaken the divine music which lies in it dormant, he would indeed be happy to strike the chords. The poet's prayer in this concluding couplet could put him in the same category as those who were instrumental in putting India back on the cultural map, viz. renowned Orientalists like William Jones, H. H. Wilson, Thomas Munro and F. Max Muller who attempted to showcase the country's opulent traditional heritage to the West.

The harp as a literary symbol has its origins in Classical Greece but was also used by the Romantics as an icon of bardic song. Through it, Derozio invokes the magnificent heritage of India, the great country whose riches and potentialities lie inert and undiscovered under a foreign rule. It could also refer to India's poetic or artistic genius which, after centuries of splendid manifestation, is at present marked by sterility. Derozio's approach to the country's glorious past is imbued with a blend of patriotism and Byronic melancholy. This sonnet has an unconventional rhyme-scheme of *ababbab-cdcdcbb*. It marks a variation from both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean format. The poet's use of such words and phrases as 'ruined monument', 'hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough' and 'grave' to mark his lamentation at the pitiable condition of contemporary India is reminiscent of Shakespeare's famous *Sonnet LXXIII*, "That time of year thou mayst in me behold" with its echoes of 'bare ruined choirs', 'yellow leaves …do hang/ Upon those boughs' and 'deathbed'.

The introduction of English literary studies into the school and college curriculum in colonial India, beginning with its erstwhile capital Calcutta, led to the creation of a new class of natives who would faithfully serve the Imperial administration in the years to come. At the same time it also had, perhaps even paradoxically, the not so intended effect of releasing a new understanding and sensibility among the educated Indians. This, in the long run, gave rise to a strong feeling of nationalism culminating in the

country's independence more than a century later. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the patriotic fervour in "The Harp of India" was later reiterated in Hur Chunder Dutt's "Sonnet: India", part of *The Dutt Family Album*. A noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry is this burning nationalistic passion, somewhat surprising in a Eurasian considering that most members of his community would have rather sided with the British to further their social status. Poems like "The Harp of India", "To India – My Native Land", "The Golden Vase" and "To the Pupils of Hindu College" have an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterances which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a son of the soil. Derozio is also a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend, imagery and diction (viz. 'Highest Himalay' in "Poetry", 'Gunga's roll' in "Song of the Indian Girl", 'Chandra's beams" in "The Eclipse" and 'Sweet Sitar' in "Song of the Hindoostani Misntrel") despite the otherwise overt influence of British literary traditions.

Activities:

1. Try to locate Thomas Moore's poem mentioned in this section and find out how far it resembles "The Harp of India."
2. Prepare a list of the adjectives used in the poem and classify them. Are they applied keeping the time period in mind?
3. "Thou hands are cold" – What image does it evoke?
4. Prepare a list of words used in the poem that suggest sound/soundlessness.
5. What are the characteristic features of a 'harp?' Can this be applied to a country?
6. What is the importance of the human touch in the context of harp/country?

2.6.6 Toru Dutt's Life and Her Works

Toru [Torulata] Dutt was born on 4 March 1856 in Calcutta, the youngest of three children of Govin Chunder Dutt. The Dutt family was distinguished, with many of its members being noted historians and poets. Apart from his contribution to *The Dutt Family Album*, her father who was a poet and linguist also published *The Loyal Hours* (1876) and *Cherry Stones* (1881). Thus Toru had the dual advantage of a wealthy parentage and an intellectual and cultural inheritance of a high order. She was taught by English tutors at home, and later on gained wide exposure to Western languages and cultures by virtue of her long stays in Europe and England. The Dutts and their children Abju, Aru and Toru were baptized and converted to Christianity in 1862. However, under the influence of her mother Kshetramoni who remained a pious Hindu, Toru learnt about Indian legends and *puranas*, as well the Hindu religion and culture. She put emphasis back on India and was the first Indian woman to reveal the spirit and essence of her homeland to the West, although her verse would also glow with sparks of English romanticism.

The Dutt family was ravaged by personal losses from early on. In 1865, Govin's eldest child and Toru's only brother Abju died when he was just a boy of fourteen. They left for Europe in 1869. Govin Chunder had once even thought of settling down there – a move that could be construed as an attempt to leave behind the bereavements of their past home and go for a change of scenery. Toru and her elder sister Aru joined a French school at Nice. The education they received enabled them to improve their mastery over the local language to a great extent. The sisters used to regularly translate French lyrics to English. These were to be eventually published in 1876 as *A Sheaf Glean'd in French Fields*. This contained poems translated of about a hundred French poets. The books found much favour both in England and India, and went into three editions within a short span. Toru was a linguistic prodigy; as such, her translations were not slavish imitations of the original. These show ingenuity and of the 165 pieces, eight were written by Aru [although the title page did not mention her name] and the rest by Toru; she had also added notes on the French poets included in the collection. The family shifted to Cambridge in England in 1871. There the two sisters attended 'Higher Lectures for Women'. They returned to Calcutta two years later and divided their time between their two houses at Rambagan and Baugmaree. Tragedy struck once more when Toru too passed away from consumption like her elder sister Aru at the tender age of twenty-one on 30 August 1877, leaving her parents forlorn and devastated.

After her death, Govin Chunder Dutt looked through her belongings and chanced upon the manuscripts of a French novel called *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*. It is the first French fiction written and published by an Indian, published in 1879 to much critical acclaim. He also found an unfinished romance in English titled *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* [published serially in 1878]. There were also her lyrics, compiled together in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and published in 1882. It is this book on which Toru's literary reputation primarily rests now. The father also provided the missing links wherever necessary. Toru was proficient in both English and French, yet she realised that her Oriental background was rich enough to offer her a source for exercising her literary skill and creativity. She rendered several Sanskrit anecdotes and legends into English verse from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *puranas*. Two of the ballads are centred on the archetypes of Indian womanhood–Sita and Savitri [later to be taken up by Sri Aurobindo in his own epic]; four narrate the legends of youths Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu and Prehlad; one recounts the story of the goddess Uma; Lakshman, king Bharata and Sunneetee are some of the other characters that stand out in this work. In the poem "Jogadhya Uma", Uma or Durga is described in a way that was characteristic of the tradition where the goddess is regarded as a daughter who returns to her home from her in-laws every autumn. As evident from this list, Toru Dutt was to make use of local myth

and legend extensively. She also brought the personal and cultural dimensions of her experience into her writing.

2.6.7 "Our Casuarina Tree" (Text)

Like a huge python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.
When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.
But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

Casuarina is a genus of 17 species in the family Casuarinaceae, native to Australasia, the Indian Subcontinent, southeast Asia, and islands of the western Pacific Ocean. They are evergreen shrubs and trees, and their foliage consists of slender, much-branched green to grey-green twigs bearing minute scale-leaves in whorls. The flowers are produced in small catkin-like inflorescences; the flowers are simple spikes. The generic name is derived from the Malay word for the cassowary, kasuari, alluding to the similarities between the bird's feathers and the plant's foliage, though the tree is called rhu in current standard Malay.

What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.
Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose,—before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.
Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
'Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow'; and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse. (Paranjape 42-43)

2.6.8 Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem was part of Toru's *Miscellaneous Poems* included at the end of her *Ballads*. Often regarded as the most characteristic of her verses, it has been praised by E. G. Thomas as 'surely the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner' (qtd. in Ramamurti 83). The tree referred to here grew in the Dutt's country residence of Baugmaree in north Calcutta where she lived till the age of twelve. In a letter written to her friend Mary Martin on 13 May 1876, Toru gives the following description of her

surroundings: 'The night was clear….before us stretched the long avenue bordered with high Casuarinas very like the poplars of England…' (qtd. in Das 154). The poem comprises five eleven-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme of *abba, cddc eee*. The first stanza presents an objective sketch of the tree; it is described as a giant whose trunk is scarred, denoting its age and ruggedness. A creeper climbs around it, up to the very top, and while its python-like grip would have sucked the life out of any ordinary tree, the casuarina gallantly continues to stand holding its head high among the stars. It wears this liana as a scarf on its canopy, dotted with red casuarina flowers hanging on its branches, all of which give the tree a distinct look. Birds and bees frequent the tree at all hours, and the sweet song of one of these birds during night-time fills the ambience with melodious music. The word 'darkling' here instantly reminds the reader of its use in a similar context in Keats' famous "Ode to a Nightingale."

The second stanza describes the narrator's enjoyment of the sight of the tree at different times of the day. When her 'casement' is opened in the morning, the very first scene that meets her eyes is this casuarina tree. The line is once again very Keatsian in diction, reminiscent of his 'magic casements' in the same ode. Usually in winters, a gray baboon would often sit at the tree's crest and watch the sunrise while its young one jumped from branch to branch and played around. The advent of morning would also be announced by the cries of the 'kokilas', and this would mark the beginning the day's activities, starting with the cows wending to the green pastures to graze on. The use of such images as baboon and kokilas brands the poem with an unmistakable Indian stamp. The casuarina casts its shadow on the nearby tank which is covered with water-lilies. These white flowers in their full bloom give the appearance of snow and make for a beautiful view.

The third stanza changes the mood of the poem from the descriptive to the reflective, thereby offering a clue to the inner soul of the narrator. She recalls the many tender memories of her past, especially the days spent playing with her childhood companions under the tree's shade. This is actually an allusion to Toru's elder brother Abju and sister Aru, both of whom had sadly passed away in their teens. The use of 'our' in the poem's title emphasises the close bond she shared with them, made all the more poignant by these remembrances. One can surely notice the influence of the Romantics here, for Toru's case offers a striking parallel to Keats as the death of his younger brother Tom had intensified both Keats' pain and poetic fervour that eventually found expression in "Ode to a Nightingale." Her other poem "Sita" draws upon a similar childhood memory of three siblings listening to their mother's songs. Grand and charming as it is, the casuarina is all the more dear to the poetess for the innumerable associations that it springs in her

mind. These associations eventually, and understandably, make her eyes blind with tears. She even hears a 'dirge-like murmur' which is likened to the sound of the sea breaking on a shingle beach. Dutt here echoes Matthew Arnold in his similarly contemplative poem "Dover beach." The poet deems this 'eerie speech' to be the tree's unique elegy on the loss of the two children who are now inhabitants of an unknown land. Thus we see that even as she wielded her knowledge of English literature with consummate skill, she could simultaneously translate her personal experience of pain into her verse which was tinged with the sense of loss and nostalgia that arose from the early bereavements in her life.

This lamentation sent forth by the tree is universal, as demonstrated in the fourth stanza. The narrator lets us know that she has heard this wail even when she was living in distant lands, far removed from her Calcutta home. It is a reference to Toru Dutt's stay abroad, as she herself makes it clear in the subsequent lines while mentioning the foreign shores of France and Italy [while the Dutts did live in France for about a year before proceeding to England, we are not sure if they travelled to Italy as well]. There is a slight shift in the way the casuarina is presented in the poem at this juncture; it no longer remains the physical tree so objectively described in the initial two stanzas but takes on a sublime form and becomes a symbol of timeless eternity. It is in this shape that it appears to the poet henceforth, visible only to her 'inner vision'. The tree is inextricably linked with all the happy memories of her past, and acts as a trigger for her acute sense of nostalgia.

The last stanza is a tribute to the immortality of the tree, and has a faint thematic link with Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The narrator dedicates the poem to honour it, for it was cherished not only by her but also those who now lie in everlasting sleep. She wishes for it to remain ageless, even as her own days are numbered. One cannot miss the irony in these ominous lines, for Toru Dutt was soon to follow her siblings into the realm of death. Her mention of the boughs of Borrowdale with its Wordsworthian import [the Borrowdale valley is situated in the Lake Districts of Cumbria in England], and lines from the poet's 1803 poem "Yew Tree" once again harks back to the memories of the English chapter in her brief life. The concluding section unfolds her desire for the immortality of the tree, to be conferred upon by her verses. Although her verse is feeble, it is hoped that her immense love towards the casuarina can defend it from the ravages of time. The poem begins with recollections of the past, but ultimately culminates in a higher plane of sublime reflection. The motif of bestowing immortality through poetry was Greek in its origins, though later appropriated by others as well. The most prominent name that

comes to our mind in this respect is Shakespeare himself who reiterated the theme in a number of his sonnets.

> So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (*Sonnet XVIII*)

The poem is invested with the glamour of an Indian childhood, and laced with reminiscences of English literature and life. Staying abroad increased her awareness of the India she was familiar with, which was duly reflected in her poetical works. The success of the poem lies in the concretization of something as amorphous as nostalgia which is a common enough experience for all exiles. In a way, it also reminds the reader of Wordsworth's other famous poem "Tintern Abbey" where the poet proclaimed that the pastoral landscape of the river Wye was prized to him both for its natural beauty as well as the solace offered on account of the felicitous memories of his past visit there with his sister Dorothy. The poem is, thus, one of the earliest instances of the effective use of memory in Indian poetry in English. It is representative of the manner in which Toru Dutt managed to transcend the literary style of her predecessors and contemporaries, evolving a distinct identity which enabled her poetic vision to radiate beyond the boundaries within which most of the nineteenth century Indian poetry in English remained confined.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of the flora and the fauna mentioned in the poem. How do they contribute to the overall effect the poem creates?
2. Prepare a list of personal pronouns used in the poem. What do they suggest?
3. Prepare a list of words/phrases that denote the cry of sorrow.
4. Prepare a list of places/countries that you come across in the poem.
5. Note down the points to show that memory/nostalgia play an important role in the poem.
6. Note down the words beginning with capital letters. Why are they used with capital initials? (Do not consider the first words of each line)

2.6.9 Summing Up

The poets discussed in the above sections belong to the first wave of Indian English poetry; 'modern' Indian poetry that came in the post-Independence era has changed its track substantially over the years both in terms of content and style. It must be mentioned here that many critics and commentators, Western and Indian alike, have come down heavily on these early poets. Theodore Douglas Dunn, Inspector of Schools, Presidency

Division, Bengal and also editor of the first anthology of Indian Poetry in English titled *India in Song: Eastern Themes in English Verse by British and Indian Poets* wrote: 'It is not generally known that during this century [beginning about the year 1817] much good English verse was produced by Indians…' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 1). They were criticised for the supposed ersatz sentiments evident in their writings that belie a meek imitation of Romantic and Victorian features. The common refrain seems to be that their poems were marred by the swelling euphoria of the late romantic tradition, and this style of writing was dated in the present era. Keki N. Daruwalla characterised pre-Independence poetry as 'pseudo-spiritual, pseudo-philosophical', 'brimming with sonorous Miltonicisms' – possibly an allusion to Aurobindo's influence (qtd. in King *Three* 9). Their successors championed the 'Indian' element in their poems, as a result of which they found favour with the later literary 'pundits'. Bruce King stated that 'most Indian poetry before Ezekiel was old-fashioned, Victorian, amateur, either public political declamations or spiritual guidance, more a hobby than an art' (King *Three* 3). Thus we see that their writings have been viewed with either historical concessions or condescension. However, in defence of these earlier poets, K. S. Ramamurti argues that if pure poetry is something that 'induces in the well-tuned mind a condition akin to that of the silent mystical contemplation which is the supreme form of prayer,' it can certainly be found in the works of Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo (70). As such, instead of pronouncing quick judgements on these poets, it is perhaps sensible to leave it to posterity to decide on their respective merits as practitioners of poetry.

2.6.10 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of "The Harp of India".
2. "Our Casuarina Tree" is a tribute to not only the tree but also the early and late Romantic poetic tradition – Comment.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. How does Derozio eulogize the hoary past of India?
2. Would you agree to the view that Dutt successfully fuses her Indian and Western experience in "Our Casuarina Tree? Justify.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Comment on Derozio's use of the harp metaphor in his sonnet.
2. Write a note on the images used by Dutt in "Our Casuarina Tree".

2.6.11 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 7 ❐ Nissim Ezekiel : “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher”

Structure

2.7.1 Objectives

In this unit, we shall discuss Nissim Ezekiel’s poem, “Poet, Lover Birdwatcher.” This poem, unlike the poems discussed in the earlier unit, reflects the spirit of modern India. We shall learn to appreciate this poem from the perspectives of Indian socio-cultural reality, use of new aesthetic idioms and representational strategies.

2.7.2 Introduction

The post-Independence period in the history of Indian English literature is generally considered as the modern period, though not all poets could be termed ‘modern.’ Coming to the mid-twentieth century, we find that majority of the Indian poets writing in English eschewed the excesses of the romanticism associated with their predecessors. The British colonial rulers had left the subcontinent, and the political freedom that was ushered in brought in its wake a sense of intellectual liberation as well. This ‘new’ brand of poetry began with Nissim Ezekiel and the poets of the Writers Workshop group led by P. Lal. These writers were extolled as ‘Progressives’ and ‘Proletarians,’ and sought to make a clean break with past poetic traditions. They were deeply beleaguered by the question of national identity, and no longer felt the imperative to imitate the earlier practitioners. On the contrary, they started producing a literature of protest, disenchanted as they were with romanticism and Victorianism. They turned more satirical, cynical and ironic with passing years. Poets like Dom Moraes, A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Rajagopal Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N. Daruwalla were keenly aware of their Indian environment, which found ample reflection in their poetic output. Moraes focussed on sex and death as his main poetical themes; his self-imposed exile in England and eventual return to India made him a precursor to the figures of the globalized Indian. All

these duly coloured his works. Mahapatra's poetry may be regarded as experiments with theme, form and modes of communication. His emphasis is more on subjective memory and inner self than on the external world or actual events. Daruwalla's poems, on the other hand, maintain a balance between the inner world of consciousness and the outer realm of landscape. It is often characterised by a note of anger at incompetence and corruption, simultaneously showing an ethical and moral consciousness expressed in satirical outbursts. Shiv K. Kumar similarly expresses anger and frustration, this time in a confessional mode. R. Parthasarathy's expatriate experience while staying in England left him thoroughly disillusioned, to the extent that he felt quite trapped in a lag between his native and adopted languages. He admired Ramanujan's considerable success in integrating his bi-cultural and tri-lingual situation, and tried to establish a relationship between his Indian English poetry and Tamil roots. Disappointment is his chief theme, and his famous utterance 'My tongue in English chains' in the opening lines of "Homecoming" (80-84) is perhaps symptomatic of what other diasporic poets like Adil Jussawalla (England) and Dilip Chitre (USA) felt and expressed in their poetry. While Jussawalla sought a unity of being by identifying himself with a revolutionary process in his later poems, Chitre, who also wrote in Marathi, gave voice to his sense of isolation and frantic search for moorings in his long poem "Travelling in a Cage." Arun Kolatkar, a fellow-Marathi bilingual poet, is famous for his experimental style in his first book *Jejuri* as well as in *The Boatride*, both of which exhibit surrealist elements. Likewise, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra too uses surrealist techniques of automatic writing, and later gives them a finished look. His poems generally take the form of sensory impressions, making their impact on the reader though associative reverberation of images.

2.7.3 Ezekiel's Life and his Works

Nissim Ezekiel was born on 16 December 1924 in Bombay (modern-day Mumbai) of Jewish (Bene-Israeli) parents. He was educated at Antonio D'Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay, and later studied at Birkbeck College, London. Though he had originally gone to England to study philosophy under C. E. M. Joad, he showed equal interest in the theatre and the visual arts as also in poetry. His initial career as a clerk in the High Commissioner's office in London had not in any way made him slacken his interest either in his intellectual pursuits or in his creative efforts. After working in journalism, advertising and broadcasting, he took up a teaching job in 1961 at Mithibai College, Bombay. He later became a faculty member of the University of Bombay, teaching American Literature, and retired as Professor of English. Like A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy and Shiv K. Kumar, he too was, thus, an academic poet. In 1964, he was a Visiting

Professor at Leeds University – an invitee of the U. S. Government under its International Visitors Programing 1974 – and in 1975, a Cultural Award Visitor to Australia. For a period he was also the Director of Theatre Unit, Bombay. His early verse was collected in *A Time to Change* (1951), *Sixty Poems* (1953) and *The Third* (1958). His poems in *An Unfinished Man* (1960) are some of his most impressive ones while those in *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) and *Collected Poems* (1989) are satirical, confessional and also contemplative. *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982), which are replies to the Old Testament psalms and show his increased interest in his Jewish heritage, was selected for the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1983, the highest literary honour of the country. His other works include *Three Plays* (1969) and *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (1974) – translations from the Marathi of Indira Sant. He has had poems published in *Encounter*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *London Magazine* and *The Spectator*. Apart from being a poet, he was also an art critic and reviewer. He edited periodicals like *Quest*, *Imprint*, *Poetry India*, *The Indian P.E.N.* and the poetry page of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. He also helped and promoted other poets, and in the year 1988, this man of letters was presented with the Padma Shri for his manifold contributions to the Indian literary arena. He passed away on 9 January 2004.

Ezekiel's poems focus on a variety of themes such as love, sex, death, loneliness and prayer. They show a consistent preoccupation with the banality as well as the complexity of present day civilization as he perceived it in the Indian scene. One also finds in his poems the imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level his innermost feelings. He was a quietly explorative poet with a strain of religious philosophy flowing through his verse. The fact that he was a Jew by faith living in a predominantly Hindu country made his case singular. He said of himself, 'I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 28). In the poem "Background, Casually" he expresses his thoughts on this issue unambiguously, underscoring the resultant sense of alienation. Not surprisingly, his birth and upbringing coupled with his 'Indian' world-view developed into a personality that found reflection in his oeuvre. The espousal of the self in his work is perhaps one consequence of the realization that he needed to create a poetic sphere of his own. Ezekiel cultivated a direct and often conversational tone to convey his moods and thoughts in his poetry. Writing in "A Different Way," towards the end of *Collected Poems*, he describes himself as

> …a drug-addict
> whose drugs are work, sensuality,
> poetry, and the dance of the self… (272)

It should be noted that while the early poems of Ezekiel were in free verse, the poems of *The Unfinished Man* show purposeful, stylized, high regularity. From the mid-1960s, however, his poems were written for oral delivery. We find in them the poetry of the spoken voice more than that of the printed page. According to R. Parthasarathy most Indian poets who write in English, with the exception of Nissim Ezekiel, have little or no use for traditional English prosody. Their emphasis is almost entirely on the visual as opposed to the aural element in verse. It was only Ezekiel who handled both metre and rhyme as well as free verse with skill (10).

2.7.4 Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher (Text)

To force the pace and never to be still
Is not the way of those who study birds
Or women. The best poets wait for words.
The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing;
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering –
In this the poet finds his moral proved,
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.
The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more.
To watch the rarer birds, you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
In silence near the source, or by a shore
Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor.
And there the women slowly turn around,
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light
With darkness at the core, and sense is found
By poets lost in crooked, restless flight,
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.

(Paranjape 111-112)

The title is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's famous 'the lunatic, the lover and the poet' analogy in his comedy A Midsummer Night's Dream. *The inherent theme has affinities with the sonnet "Loving in Truth" by the Elizabethan Sir Philip Sidney where the poet is admonished for not looking into his heart while penning his lines, for it alone can bring about a happy rendering of his thoughts and emotions into poetry.*

2.7.5 Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem, included in the volume *The Exact Name*, is one of the best and most beautiful of Ezekiel's poems. It shows how far the poet had moved away from the romantic idealism

of his initial years, eulogized in *A Time to Change*. The poem is written in iambic pentameter in two stanzas of ten lines each, rhymed *abbaacdcdd*. Ezekiel here draws a subtle comparison between the poet, the lover, and the birdwatcher [who could be either an ornithologist or someone who takes a casual interest in the subject] where both the poet and the lover are put on the same level as the birdwatcher. Ezekiel finds a common denominator in his group, namely that they are all given to patient, silent waiting. The importance of patience is emphasized in all the three cases, citing its multiple uses in the long run. The diverse acts of watching birds in the wild, writing poems and pursuing the beloved, here a woman, are meant to be carried out in a leisurely, unhurried manner. Ezekiel opines that all these are various examples of 'hunt', but not in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, they entail a certain care combined with caution to ensure success of the mission. The birdwatcher has to keep still and avoid all forms of sudden movement so as not to ruffle the bird(s) that he intends to observe. It is almost a labour of love; a delicate process marked by gentle tending until one inches towards the ultimate goal.

According to Ezekiel, a man ought to seek the love of a woman with utmost mildness. She would first need to feel secure and confident in his love for her to be finally able to reciprocate his feelings. It is only when he has won her trust that she would reply to his romantic overtures in the affirmative. This especially applies to all those distinguished women who, being endowed with refined sensibilities, would respond to only the very sincerest of male advances. Such a union would usher in a state of felicity characterized by an all-pervasive glow. The slow curving movements of the woman have a sensual appeal, John Thieme in his Introduction to Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* thus equates poetry to 'a form of erotics, a kind of lovemaking that quietly waits for the Muse to make the first move' (xxiii). The poet sees in these feminine gestures the promise of an apocalypse; they are 'myths of light' whose essential darkness or mystery remains at the centre of the creation itself (Ramamurti 129). Similarly, if the birdwatcher desires to catch a sight of the rarer birds, he will have to step beyond the regular domain of urban areas and venture into spaces close to nature. He has to travel to zones of silence viz. uninhabited places, along river-banks or sea-shores, and such other remote spots to find a glimpse of these uncommon specimens. Inder Nath Kher concurs that ''in order to possess the vision of the rarer birds of his psyche the poet has to go through the 'deserted lanes' of his solitary private life; he has to walk along the primal rivers of his consciousness in silence or travel to a far off shore which is 'like the heart's dark floor' '' (qtd. in Ramamurti 129). The same is true of a poetic piece that has been written after due deliberation by the poet. R. Parthasarathy in his introductory notes to the poem writes:

> In "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", the search for love and the word is presented in the person of a birdwatcher. The image is appropriate in the context, where it helps to control a 'potentially explosive situation'. Both love and words visit the poet without his knowledge. There is no pursuit, only waiting. In fact, the waiting itself becomes a form of pursuit, a strategy. It is only then that the revelation occurs. The analogies, separately explored, now come together, and the metaphor used to suggest this fusion is light…''Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" epitomizes Ezekiel's search for a poetics which would help him redeem himself in his eyes and in the eyes of God. (28-29)

Ezekiel's concept of the act of poetic creation in fact comes very close to the traditional Indian view which believes that the poet has to wait, wait for the 'descent of the divine' (Ramamurti 38). For Ezekiel, the art of composing a poem is not an easy one, nor can it be accomplished in haste. It is time-consuming, involving periods of long wait until the right inspiration hits the poet, which in turn is akin to the triumph associated with the appearance of a woman who knows that she is loved and hence surrenders at the opportune moment. One notices a somewhat similar reflection of anguish and frustration involved in the vocation of a poet towards the middle of Ezekiel's another famous poem "Background, Casually" where he writes:

> The later dreams were all of words.
> I did not know that words betray
> But let the poems come,… (181)

Ezekiel's poetic dictum insists on a careful choice of apposite expressions to be used in course of writing the poem. Their sound and meaning would then merge in the white light of creativity and attain literary fruition, resulting in a piece of art that has the power to enable everyone, even those deprived of hearing and sight, to appreciate its exquisite brilliance. As Anisur Rahman remarks, the artist who is ''subjected to the rigours of experience goes about making steady observations about life and waits for the right moment of utterance….Pursued with sincerity and devotion, art or poetry is elevated to such remedial heights where the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight'' (qtd. in Ramamurti 129). Thus, Ezekiel seems to suggest that highest poetry is remedial in its action. The poet has skilfully worked out a set of images moving on three interpenetrating levels, and the following comments by Inder Nath Kher with regard to the intricate imagery of the poem offer further illumination:

> In this complex symbolic construct, several of Ezekiel's themes and concerns blend into one another. The poem reveals the nature of the poetic perception through the network of a highly fecund metaphor in which the images merge into each other like lovers in the act of love. The poet or the birdwatcher begins by defining the

mood in which all those who study birds or women must place themselves – birds or women symbolize freedom, imagination, love and creativity. (qtd. in Ramamurti 128)

Ezekiel's postulations on the subject can also be traced in his 1975 essay titled "Poetry as Knowledge" where he tells us that ''What the poet knows makes the poem what it is, if the poet's knowledge is alive and his art fully extended while he writes the poem'' (qtd. in Parthasarathy 29). It may be mentioned here that the creative art has been an oft-discussed theme in Indian English poetry; Shankar Mokashi Punekar's "Birth of a Poem" is a case in point; another pertinent example would be "A Small Whisper" by Dom Moraes:

> I have spent several years fighting with words
> And they fight back with words that perplex. (qtd. in Ramamurti 42)

Activities:

1. What is that one particular trait that connects the poet, the lover, and the birdwatcher?
2. Explain the phrase: "myth of light."
3. Does the poem make an attempt to explain the art of poetic creation?
   How is the act of 'waiting' important in the creative process?
4. Try to study other poems written by Ezekiel where he expresses the pangs of poetic creation.

2.7.6 Summing Up

A common charge put forth against 'modern' Indian English poets is that being of middle-class origin, with an urban or metropolitan and often academic background as also with experience of living in the West, they have become strangers to their indigenous culture. As such, their poetry does rarely reflect rural India; their 'modernity' derives much from the influence of their Western counterparts, especially T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden, by way of echoes, resonances and reverberations. In their defence, however, it may be said that these writers were intensely aware of the unenviable situation in which they functioned. Poets like Ramanujan, Moraes, Kumar, Jussawalla and Chitre, while living abroad, exploited the situation to their advantage and delineated the dichotomy of the diasporic experience. In doing so, they, as also their resident Indian compatriots, strove to find an adequate and, more importantly, a personal language to express themselves even as they wrote in a foreign tongue. Ramanujan spoke of himself as 'hybrid', even

joking that he was a 'hyphen'. Ezekiel indeed showed how contemporary poetry in English could use traditional forms of verse and metrics.

2.7.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Analyse the use of imagery in "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher."
2. Would you agree that "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" is essentially a poem that represents the poetics of Ezekiel? Justify.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Why is patience deemed to be of utmost importance in the pursuit of word, bird and beloved?
2. List two prominent literary influences evident in "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher".

2.7.8 Suggested Readings

Ezekiel, Nissim. *Collected Poems*. Introduction by John Thieme. 1989. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.

King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English.* New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001.—. *Three Indian Poets: Ezekiel, Moraes, and Ramanujan*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: OUP, 2005.

Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna, ed. *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. 1992. New Delhi: OUP, 2011.

Parthasarathy, R., ed. *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*. 1976. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.

Ramamurti, K. S., ed. *Twenty-five Indian Poets in English*. 1995. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2008.

Ramanujan, A. K. *The Collected Poems of A. K. Ramanujan*. Delhi: OUP, 1995.

Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English*. London & New York: Longman, 1990.

Unit - 8 ❑ Jayanta Mahapatra's "Dawn at Puri"

Structure

2.8.1 Objectives

This unit offers an intensive discussion on Jayanta Mahapatra's poem, "Dawn at Puri". This poem truly captures the spirit of the landscape and the culture of Orissa. We shall learn to appreciate the themes, the style and the language used by Mahapatra in this unit.

2.8.2 Introduction

Jayanta Mahapatra was the first Indian English poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award. He has made an indelible mark on the history of Indian poetry in English. He is one of the few modern poets whose works express the voice of the aggrieved and the marginalised. Being a humanist, he is the 'most outspoken votary' of his native state Orissa and its common people. Mahapatra's Orissa is not just a physical entity, it is a space sustained by an intense poetic emotion. His representation of the region and its people raises important humanitarian questions. Orissa becomes the site of universal humanitarian concerns. Writing in the post-colonial period, Mahapatra inevitably draws

our attention to the problems of poverty, hunger, corruption, hypocrisy through a studied focus on this particular region in the 'postcolony.' Reading his poems thus implies an engagement with the socio-cultural condition of the region and the nation. In this unit we shall discuss Mahapatra's short poem "Dawn at Puri."

2.8.3 Jayanta Mahapatra: Life and Works

In order to appreciate Jayanta Mahapatra's poems, we need to have some information about his own life and works. He was born on 22 October 1928 in an Odiya Christian family based in Cuttack, Orissa. He had his early education in Stewart School in Cuttack and he later shifted to Patna University, Bihar from where he earned his master's degree in Physics in 1949. He started his professional career as a teacher of Physics and taught in various government colleges in Orissa. He started writing poetry quite late in his life, almost in his 40s. In 1971, his debut collection of poetry, *Close the Sky: Ten by Ten* was published. Some of his other anthologies are *Svayambara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *Relationship* (1980, Sahitya Akademi Award, 1981), *The False Start* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983), *Dispossessed Nests: The 1984 Poems* (1986), *Selected Poems* (1987), *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988) , *Temple* (1989), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992), *Shadow Space* (1997), *Bare Space* (2000), *Random Descent* (2005) and *The Lie of Dawns* (2009).

Apart from the Sahitya Akademi award, Mahapatra bagged Jacob Lanstein Memorial Award in 1975, SAARC Literary Award in 2009, Alen Tate Prize from the *Sewanee Review*, 2009, and the coveted Padmashree Award (2009) in the field of literature.

2.8.4 "Dawn at Puri" (The Text)

Dawn at Puri
Endless crow noises.
A skull in the holy sands
tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White-clad widowed women
past the centres of their lives
are waiting to enter the great Temple

Their austere eyes
stare like those caught in a net
hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith.
The frail early light catches

ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another
a mass of crouched faces without names,

and suddenly breaks out of my hide
into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre
that fills my aging mother:

her last wish to be cremated here
twisting uncertainly like light
on the shifting sands.

Glossary:
Tilt: slant, bend, incline
Austere: sombre, grave
Strand: one of the elements interwoven in a complex whole such as rope
Leprous: infested with leprosy, scaly, scurfy
Crouched: to bow specially in humility or fear
Blaze: an intensely burning fire
Sullen: gloomily silent
Solitary: lonely, without companions
Pyre: a combustible heap for burning a dead body as a funeral rite
Cremate: to reduce to ashes by burning.

2.8.5 Critical Understanding of the Poem

2.8.5.1 Indianness and Regionalism in Mahapatra

Indian English poetry, though written in a 'colonial' language, is very much Indian in theme, style and tone. Indian landscape, flora and fauna, socio-cultural traditions, emotional make-up and thought process – all these find expression in the poems written by Indian English poets. Both national and regional aspects find their way into their poems. Regionalism comes out smoothly through the linguistic medium of the English language. K. Ayappa Paniker observes,

> Kamala Das is a Kerala poet writing in English. Nissim Ezekiel is a Bombay [now Mumbai] poet writing in English. Jayanta Mahapatra is an Orissan poet writing in English. The language of their writing does not seem to make them less Indian. … All these writers are Indian because they deal with Indian experience irrespective

> of the language in which they write. Kerala, Bombay and Orissa are India. It is not by ignoring or suppressing the regional features that one achieves Indianness. (15)

If you read the above extract carefully, you will find two major issues:

1. National identity and regional identity are not contradictory; on the contrary, they are complementary and they reinforce each other.
2. English is no longer a foreign language; it has become an Indian language. One can express one's own emotion freely and spontaneously in the language. It does not hinder the expression of Indianness in any way. Of course, Indian English differs from the British English, and Indianised English is now quite acceptable.

In the context of the above, it will be good if you go back to Unit 4 (''Indian Writing in English : The Post-colonial Period'') in Module 1, and read particularly 1.4.3 (''Anxiety of Indianness and Indian Writing in English'')

Bruce King in his book, *Modern Indian Poetry in English* considers Mahapatra, along with Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and Arvind Mehrotra, to be one of the experimentalist poets. They, according to him, experimented with both form and the 'view of reality.' He observes, "Mahapatra, along with Chitre in some poems, appears to have learned from Robert Bly and other American poets of the late '60s and early '70s a new means of using the external world to present subjective feeling" (198).

"In *A Rain of Rites* (1976) Mahapatra uses symbols from his environment to articulate specific emotions. The titles of the poems included in the volume are indicative of how aspects of the external world, especially the Indian landscape and seasons, become the sites of a fertile imagination.… The world is seen and then decreated to allow emotions at the edge of awareness to come forward. Such poetry suggests more than is said as it reveals areas of the mind unstructured by rational concepts and logic" (King 199). According to Sachidanand Mohanty, "Mahapatra is strongly rooted in Cuttack and his poetry is a blend of local myth, ritual and festival. His vision of life is one of decay, agony, loss, dejection, rejection, guilt, sin and expiation" (qtd. in S.K.Paul, 255).

Activities:

1. Read Kamala Das's well-known poem "An Introduction" and see how she expresses her own emotions in English in an idiosyncratic way. How far do you accept her justification of her own English?
2. Read Mahapatra's poem "Dawn at Puri" now to find out how it represents both regionalism and Indianness.

3. Try to identify 'Indianness' in Mahapatra's poem. Is there any Indianness in his use of English? (Try to read the poem along with Kamala Das's poem ''An Introduction'' in order to investigate their use of English. Also keep in mind the points made in 1.4.3 of Unit 4, Module 1).

2.8.5.2 Analysis of the Poem

The poem "Dawn at Puri" opens with a bleak image of a morning breaking out at the sea beach of Puri. For the Hindus Puri is a sacred place – the famous Jagannath Temple is located here. Although the poem foregrounds the city of Puri which represents sacredness, the images employed in the poem subvert the sense of religiosity and unearths the atrocious social practices rampant in the city and the ugliness that comes out openly there. Both sacredness and sacrilege are juxtaposed and each play against the other. The overwhelming tone of irony is pervasive in the poem. The poet sees 'endless crows' (crows being images of ugliness) making shrill, unpleasant noises which try to replace the natural sounds of the sea waves. Then follows the image of 'a scull in the holy sands' which introduces the theme of death. One naturally discovers fear of death in a handful of sands. Part of the sea beach in Puri, as we know, is also used as a cremation ground. "*Swargadwara* (Gateway to Heaven) is the name of that part of the long sea-beach where the funeral pyres go on burning" (Paniker 113). According to the popular Hindu belief, one will reach heavenly abode if he or she is cremated at the *Swargadwara*. The noise of the crows is inevitably connected with death and burning of the body and the remnant of the burnt body – the scull. The crows target the skull as their food which again introduces the motif of hunger. Hunger and starvation prevail everywhere in the landscape of India. It thus created a profound impact on the mind of the poet. It has been a recurring theme in Mahapatra's poems. During the devastating drought in 1866, it may be mentioned, the poet's grandfather Chintamani Mahapatra had to embrace Christianity in order to fight starvation. In a poem entitled ''Hunger'', Mahapatra shows the fallout of hunger – a starved father pushes his malnourished teenaged daughter to prostitution.

In the second and third stanzas we are introduced to a group of 'white-clad widowed women.' These women are waiting at the gate of the temple in order to offer worship to the deity. Women in general are seen as marginalised. In the poem entitled 'Dawn' Mahapatra observes: 'an Indian woman, piled up to her silences,/waiting for what the world will only let her do.' Widowed women are further marginalised and their condition is humiliating. Mahapatra draws our attention to this fact when he suggests that these women are forced to wear white dresses, whiteness in this case being the sign of 'purity' (sexual and otherwise) imposed on the widows. Widowhood implies a condition of irreparable loss, acute misery

and untold restrictions. The sight of these women immediately transforms the 'sacred' place into a miserable one. Their 'austere' eyes have the expression of 'those caught in a net.' This description evokes the image of fishes (Puri is incidentally the habitat of fishermen) caught in a net – they are helpless and miserable, in throes of agony, desperately fighting for a way out. They are 'past the centres of their lives,' which may mean that they are past the prime of their lives/youth and are expected to embrace the life of spirituality. The word 'centre' may also suggest the loss of their husbands who were the centres of their activities.

The next image to crop up is that of the lepers who can be spotted in and around the beach. The 'frail early light' of the morning falls upon the human figures who are no more than 'ruined leprous shells.' They appear to an onlooker as 'a mass of crouched faces without names.' Robbed of identities, they fall, like the widows mentioned earlier, into yet another category of lost souls. Mahapatra's sensitive soul is deeply concerned about the 'diseased and disfigured world around him.' Leprosy, a disease that corrodes human features, is associated with social stigma. They are considered untouchable and therefore suffer from social boycott. Abandoned by relatives and friends, they are reduced to beggars who line the streets, sea beaches, ghats and the temples at Puri.

In the next stanza, Mahapatra moves from the external world to the world of faith. The image of 'a sullen solitary pyre' reminds him of her aging mother who,like many other pious Hindus in India, wished to be cremated at the Swargadwara. This, they believe, will enable them to reach the desired destination of heaven. The poet, however, seems to be not very convinced as the phrase 'light on the shifting sands' underlines the uncertainty of the belief.

2.8.5.3 Title

If you probe deep into the title, you will realise how significant it is. Examine the two important words in the title: 'dawn' and 'Puri.' 'Dawn' is usually interpreted as a harbinger of hope and happiness. One feels refreshed when one wakes up in the morning and goes out in the open to enjoy nature, specially in a place like Puri where one comes across the spectacular view of the wide, open sea and enjoys the soothing breeze that blows from there. But the speaker in the poem does not present any such picture and all expectations of hope and happiness are denied. On the contrary, we see the morning sun rays on the 'shifting sands' – this suggests the temporary nature of the soothing sun rays at dawn and the uncertainty of the 'shifting sands.' This of course negates whatever hope one may nourish in one's mind.

Puri as a place is associated in the poem with a series of negative images – those of a cacophony of cawing crows, a human skull, widowed women, and rows of lepers, as if all are frozen into a picture. All these images disturb the minds of the readers who may be influenced by the idea of Puri as a site of religiosity, spirituality and peace of mind. This impression of the famous religious centre receives a rude jolt as one comes face to face with the disturbing images. Puri is thus not what it is imagined to be. In presenting Puri like this, Mahapatra deploys irony to great effect. (You should add detailed analysis of the images discussed earlier and offer your own comments).

2.8.5.4 Imagery

Mahapatra's poetry is loaded with images. The theme of the poem unfolds through images. He draws images from nature, human body and inanimate objects. A skilful practitioner of the montage technique, he paints the images which are "highly evocative and haunting." The images that are reiterated by him in many of his poems are those of silence, crows, dawn, sea beach, temple, leper, widow, pyre and so on.He himself comments on the role of images in the process of his poetic creation,

> Perhaps I begin with an image or a cluster of images; or an image leads to another, or perhaps the images belonging to a sort of 'group'…The image starts the movement of the poem… but I do not know where I am proceeding in the poem or how the poem is going to end. It is as though I am entering a region of darkness, a place of the mind which I have never visited before. Or if I have visited it, I have not been able to see into all the corners of that place. I grope from one level to another in my mind and try to reach the end. That's how the end of a poem of mine comes about, and it is exploratory no doubt, I don't know myself how the poem is going to be. (Naik 104)

(You have already gone through the interpretation of the images presented in "Dawn at Puri." This discussion you will find in the section "Analysis of the Poem." Go to the section and use the appropriate analytical parts here.)

2.8.5.5 Picture of the Social Reality

Though Mahapatra is enamoured by the history and myth of his birth place, the society around him is depressing and does not allow him to romanticise it in his poems. You do not find cuckoo's sweet song in his poems; instead you come across harsh cawing of the crows which fills the ambience. Moreover, to make the environment more depressing, one comes across sculls (signifier of death), ill-fated widows (victims of social oppression) and the leprosy affected beggars (misery of the helpless and the diseased). This poem in

a way is a social document. We can easily understand how society treats women in general and widows in particular. Widows are denied the basic amenities of life and the only thing they are left with is the hope for a religious and spiritual refuge which might pave the way for a fruitful afterlife. (You need to analyse the poem in order to answer a question on the social reality presented in the poem.)

2.8.5.6 Style

The poem is written in a simple language. It is based on the description of the place. Images are used as a strategy for evoking not only the spatial reality but also for generating new insights into the real nature of the place. The perpetrators of social evils are not mentioned but that does not prevent one to comprehend the socio-cultural reality. Thus, though the diction or use of language is simple, the meaning of the poem is to be accessed through the reading of the images which creates an ironical underpinning.The difficulty may arise from the fact that Mahapatra draws images both from the 'exterior world of phenomenal reality' and 'the surrealistic world' and blends them intricately. Thus, the image, as Wyndham Lewis suggests, becomes "a single language" sometimes "so hard for others to read or guess" (Naik 104).

Activities

Write critical notes on the following topics:

a) Leprosy and Social Stigma attached to it in India.

b) Life of Hindu Widows in India

c) History and mythology of Jagannath Temple and Swargadwara

d) The Geo-historical importance of Puri

e) Imagist Movement

2.8.6 Summing Up

Jayanta Mahapatra's poems help us to get an idea about modern Indian poetry. He does not write from the ivory tower. He sees himself as part of the society he lives in but keeps a distance from it when he sets out to render it in poetry. For objective representation this distancing from the subject of poetry is necessary. Orissa, as you have already seen, is usually the setting of his poems but he is more concerned about the malaise the society has been suffering from, and hence he does not portray his region in romantic terms. Writing poetry, for him, becomes a social responsibility.

2.8.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Will you consider ‘‘Dawn at Puri” as an imagist poem? Discuss.
2. Consider ‘‘Dawn at Puri” as an Indian poem written in English. What role does regionalism play here?
3. What features of ‘modernism’ do you find in ‘Dawn at Puri”? Discuss.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Briefly discuss how Puri as a landscape is presented in this poem.
2. Briefly discuss how the local and the universal intermixes in this poem.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Explain the following lines:

   a) “Their austere eyes/Stare like those caught in a net/Hanging by the dawn’s shining strands of faith.”

   b) “Ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another/ A mass of crouched faces without names”

   c) “Her last wish to be cremated here/Twisting uncertainty like light/On the shifting sands.”

2.8.8 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 9 ❑ Kamala Das: "An Introduction"; Temsula Ao: "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer"

Structure

2.9.1 Objectives

This unit will provide a detailed discussion on two poems: Kamala Das's "An Introduction" and Temsula Ao's "A Tiger Woman's Prayer." Das is a well-known feminist poet and the poem represents strong feminist sensibilities. On the other hand, Ao's poem represents the unique Naga worldview that embraces man and nature in an inseparable relationship. This unit will analyse the theme and style of the two poems written from two different socio-cultural perspectives.

2.9.2 Introduction

Women writers have held a distinct place in Indian English literature throughout its history. We have already acquainted ourselves with the names of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu; other female writers of note in the nineteenth century include Swarnakumari Devi, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Their appearance on the literary scene was important, as it signalled a new era of emancipation for the Indian woman. It was made possible through the spread of education and liberal thinking. Opportunities of self-determination facilitated these early writers to express themselves freely; as a result, a strong presence of subjective elements may be discerned in their writings, be it fiction or poetry. Post-independence, this tendency gained further

momentum, and Kamala Das (1934-2009) is regarded as the most assertively individualistic among the new group of poets. Eunice de Souza (1940-) shares certain similarities with Das, and her poems are characterised by the same self-revelation. Her collections of verses are *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), and *Ways of Belonging: New and Selected Poems* (1990) which was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Her poetic diction keeps the flavour of natural English idiom without sounding stiff. This may be ascribed to the fact that speaking in English is a norm, and not an exception or embellishment, in her Goan Catholic community. She explores personal relationships in an unsentimental way, and can be quite vitriolic at times. Irony, both grim and humorous, is her forte, especially in poems like "Feeding the Poor at Christmas" and "Varca, 1942" which satirise the hypocrisy of her own community. Her dispassionate manner of writing, combined with her sharpness and clinical precision, may be best seen in "Forgive me, Mother" while her "Mrs Hermione Gonsalvez" proves her ability to write light verses. Melanie Silgardo (1956-), a fellow-Goan poet, is introspective and writes about herself and her past like de Souza who, incidentally, was her teacher. Gauri Deshpande (1942-2013) is a bilingual poet who also wrote in her mother-tongue Marathi. Mamta Kalia (1940-) exhibits her rebellious, non-conformist attitude vis-à-vis patriarchy in *Tribute to Papa* (1970) and *Poems* (1978) though she could be said to be more gay and witty compared to Das or de Souza. Other noteworthy names in this illustrious line-up of female poets include Charmayne D' Souza (1955-), Sujata Bhatt (1956-), Smita Agarwal (1958-) and Meena Kandasami (1984-). At the same time we find the emergence of a number of poets writing in English from the north-east of India. They offer fresh perspectives of lived experience and new kinds of poetic language and style. New ethos and worldview find expression in their poems. Mamang Dai and TemsulaAo are two important poets from this region. They have won wide recognition. We shall discuss their poems in this unit.

2.9.3 Das's Life and her Works

Kamala Das, daughter of the well-known Malayalam poetess Balamani Amma, was born at Punnayurkulam in southern Malabar on 31 March 1934. Her father V. M. Nair, an executive in Calcutta, later became the editor of the daily *Mathrubhumi*. Kamala had her early education in Calcutta, Punnayurkulam and Trichur. In February 1949 she was married to Madhava Das, and lived mostly in Bombay. Besides being an eminent practitioner of English poetry, she is also a reputed poet and novelist in her mother tongue Malayalam and has published eleven books in the language, writing under the pen-name of Madhavikutty. Her major works are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Collected Poems* Vol. 1 (1984), as well as

her famous autobiography *My Story* (1975). She was given the Poetry Award of *The Asian PEN Anthology* (1964), the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969 for *Thanuppu* (The Cold), a collection of short stories in Malayalam, and the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry in 1985. Das is extremely frank in her poetry right from the inception of her literary career, an attribute that is unprecedented for a woman in the then social context of India. She unabashedly expresses her need for love, and the overpowering sense of urgency almost boils over in many of her poetical works like ''The Old Playhouse," ''The Looking-glass'' and "The Freaks". On the other hand, her recollections of girlhood in Nalapat House, her grandmother's home in Kerala, are coloured with acute nostalgia; the memories come to the fore in "A Hot Noon in Malabar," "My Grandmother's House," ''Composition," "Blood" and "Elegy." Her feminist vision is articulated in many of the poems in *The Descendants* as well as in "Of Calcutta," "A Widow's Lament" and "The Stone Age." Kamala Das's decision to convert to Islam in 1999 and be known as Kamala Surayya generated as much controversy as her writings. She passed away on 31 May 2009 in Pune.

2.9.4 An Introduction (Text)

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech

For the umpteen autobiographical elements in her poetry, Kamala Das invites comparison with not only women writers like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Denise Levertov and Judith Wright but also male confessional poets like Shiv K. Kumar, John Berryman, W. D. Snograss, Theodore Roethke and Robert Lowell – for all of whom their experiences acted as the spring-board of literary outpourings.

Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre.
I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank
Pitifully. Then … I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love …
I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love

And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I. (from Sarkar 42-44)

Activities:

1. The poem is a first-person narrative. What does the poem gain being so? (Clues: autobiographical force, authenticity of experience, force of articulation, unfolding of personal, gender experience.)
2. Try to figure out the difference Kamala Das makes between 'politics' and knowing the 'the names / Of those in power'? Consider whether the following have anything to do with the issue: national history as described in text books; manipulation of power; exercise of authority.
3. What statements regarding the use of language do you come across here? Do they reflect issues like Indianness / non-Indianness; pan-Indian / regional use of language; purity / hybridity and insiderness / outsiderness, so on. Does Kamala Das try to collapse the binaries?
4. Comment on what the narrator says about her idiosyncratic use of the English language. Mention the similes used in this context.
5. Why does Kamala Das posit opponents? Does it identify the debate? (Clues: a debate, strong articulation, contestation, postcolonial resistance to pseudo-nationalism and regionalism, assertion of individualism and spontaneity of expression, gender freedom, hybridism, gender equality)
6. Note the autobiographical elements in the poem.
7. Note down the stages of Kamala Das's growing up and experiences that she encounters.
8. Explain the expression 'Fit in.' Why is it in the form of an imperative sentence? (Clues: deviation from norms, assertion of individualism, attempt to break down the binaries etc.)
9. Note down the medical terms used in the poem. Consult a good dictionary to find out their meanings. Why are they used here?
10. Identify the water bodies mentioned in the poem. Why are they used in contrastive terms?
11. Identify the verbs of action and contrastive nouns at the end of the poem. Why are they significant?

12. Why does the poem end the emphatic statement: "I too call myself I?"

[Think, on your own, of all the issues raised above, and only then proceed to read the following section.]

2.9.5 Critical Understanding of the Text

This poem was initially published in *Summer in Calcutta* and then in *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. True to its title, it offers an overview of the poetry of Kamala Das. It engages with most of the themes that have assumed prominence in her poetical oeuvre through the years. Das begins with a wry reference to politics and politicians, and the way most of our countrymen view these issues in their daily lives. It bears a parallel to the manner in which we commonly treat history i.e. remember the name of rulers and dates without bothering to comprehend the way their policies have shaped our country and society over centuries. She begins with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, and then rattles off a list of 'those in power,' albeit with the disclaimer that she doesn't 'know politics'. After this opening gambit, Das launches into the specifics of her background, referring to her complexion ('very brown'), geographical origins ('Indian,' 'born in Malabar'), and linguistic aptitude. She states that she can 'speak three languages, write in/ Two, dream in one'–perhaps not without a small bit of pride. The subsequent lines reveal that she was most comfortable writing in English, even though it was not exactly the Queen's English but merely a 'half English, half/ Indian.' This hybrid English, or what Salman Rushdie later called 'chutneyfied' English is 'funny perhaps', but Das is quick to point out that its 'distortions' and 'queernesses' were her alone, bearing the distinct stamp of her individuality. It also comes across as 'honest' and 'human', laying bare her 'joys', 'longings', 'hopes' without the slightest trace of pretension. Many demurred her choice of writing in English, including her 'critics, friends, visiting cousins' on the ground that it was not her 'mother-tongue.' Das, however, dismisses their objections as trifling and claims that the language comes as instinctively to her as 'cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions'. She asserts that 'it/ Is human speech,' and enables her to express her mind freely without any inhibitions. She thus engages in a debate with the accusing Other, proclaiming that English comes quite naturally to her, and does not undermine her loyalty to her country in any way. She utilizes the language to subvert the cavils of her petty relatives and acquaintances while simultaneously moulding it according to her own needs, thereby exhibiting her unique brand of post-coloniality.

The second stanza offers more information about the personal life of the poetess. She relates her harried passage from girlhood and adolescence to womanhood–a process that

was signalled by increase in her height, swelling of 'limbs' and sprouting of hair at 'one or two places.' Kamala Das, thus, broaches the issue of puberty by a casual reference to the subject. This is followed by her experience as a bride who had little say in the matter of either her marriage or choice of partner. She hoped and longed for love from her husband, who instead regarded her as merely a means to fulfil his carnal desires. Das eschews too many details, in fact leaves the rest unsaid, though it is not difficult to guess the shock she must have felt during these initial days of marriage. She is more forthcoming, though, in her autobiography *My Story* where she narrates many incidents that openly indicated both his heterosexual and homosexual tendencies. She is quick to mention that her husband did not 'beat' her, even as her 'sad woman-body felt so beaten.' She adds that the 'weight' of her 'breasts and womb' crushed her, making her shrink 'pitifully'. This is perhaps symptomatic of the situation of many Indian women, since our society thrusts the role of a wife on them upon reaching puberty without any preamble, in the process leaving them weighed down both physically and emotionally. Kamala Das complains that she was expected to make a smooth transition from a girl to a woman and subsequently a mother. All the while she was denied any choice in these deeply private matters.

It was in reaction to this total lack of control over her own body that the poetess rebels. She decides to bring about certain radical changes in her life and lifestyle. She cuts her hair short and starts wearing men's clothing, both designed not only to ignore her 'womanliness' but also to make a statement against the dictates of our patriarchal society. Not surprisingly, this unconventional behaviour on her part was castigated by the various spokespersons of traditionalism. They decreed that she should obediently play the dutiful 'girl' or 'woman.' They prescribe that she should dress in sarees, engage herself in embroidery, cooking and even occasionally quarrelling with the servants. Das aptly christens such voices of orthodoxy as 'categorizers.' They mechanically create categories based on class, caste and gender considerations. They cannot think outside the norms and the structure of broad social categories and are quite incapable of conceptualising individuality or personal distinctiveness. The words 'fit in' and 'belong' are their mottos. In fact, they ask her to be 'Amy,' 'Kamala' or 'Madhavikutty' (the pseudonym that Das used in Malayalam) – actions that are directed at choosing 'a name, a role' and sticking to it. As such, they are deeply critical of her actions like sitting on walls or peeping in through lace-draped windows. These are considered as unbecoming for a lady, according to them, who, must not pay attention to objects and activities outside the domestic space. They also object to her avant-garde lifestyle and forbid her to 'play pretending games,' behave like a schizophrenic or 'nympho,' or even shed tears 'embarrassingly when jilted in love.' All her attempts at expressing her free-spirited self or registering her protest are silenced or proscribed in order to maintain conformity.

The third and final stanza of the poem delves further into the life of the poetic persona. There is some ambiguity about the identity of the 'man' Kamala Das refers to ("I met a man, loved him"). It may be her husband or a lover. This problem of identification can also be found in her poem "The Old Playhouse." Devindra Kohli, for instance, assumes that in the 'autobiographical' poem the 'you' ("You called me wife") refers to the husband: "in the light of what Kamala Das says about her own relationship with her husband" (qtd. in Nabar 63-64). Brinda Nabar, however, thinks that the 'effectiveness' of the poem "lies in the fact that it is obviously a poem about an extramarital relationship" (64). In "An Introduction" also it may be interpreted that Kamala Das in fact sheds light on an extramarital affair. But the man may also be her / the speaker's husband. What is important in the context of the poem is that the identity of the man does not matter much as the individual man (whether the husband or a lover) merges into 'every man' who is seen as embodied masculine lust. The particular individual thus merges into a type. It is because of this Kamala Das uses the generic term 'man' instead of a term that denotes relationship (for example 'husband' or 'lover'). Unhappy in her marriage due to the insensitivity of her husband and desperately craving for love, she gets involved in an extramarital affair. She showered all her love on him, for he was 'every man who wants a woman,' just as she was 'every woman who seeks love,' thus identifying herself with all the women in the world who yearn for the same. Das here employs metaphoric language to signify the couple. The male is described as 'the hungry haste of rivers,' a metaphor that reveals his intense desire for a female body. The female, on the other hand, is embodied as, 'the oceans' tireless waiting.' The metaphor of the ocean suggests the limitlessness of women's patience, the prolonged, futile desire for fulfilment of love. She loved that man with all her heart. But he turned out to be an epitome of masculinity: 'he is tightly packed like the sword in its sheath.' The Man, every man, is imagined as a concealed sword. When the sheath, the facade or appearance, is taken off, the sword emerges with all its ferocity – it cuts, it hurts, it penetrates the female body. There is an overt erotic suggestion in the metaphor. However, even though she had poured her body and soul into this relationship, it too did not quite succeed in quenching her thirst for meaningful love. The fallout of this episode was that she grew frustrated and started drowning her loneliness in drinks at random hours and places: 'twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns.' Such a bohemian lifestyle got her mired in a vicious cycle of affairs followed by an acute sense of shame. Kamala Das juxtaposes contrary terms to describe her unenviable situation at this stage– she is both the 'sinner' and the 'saint', the 'beloved' and the 'betrayed'. The concluding lines of the poem end in her emphatic declaration that 'I too call myself I.' This is an assertion that attests to her coming to a fuller understanding of her own self accompanied

by a growing sense of confidence. This self-confidence prompts her to fulfil her potential as an individual. She does not heed to any of the restrictions imposed by an unfeeling society. In this last stanza, the earlier singular voice multiplies itself into myriad selves eventually coalescing into one self-assured entity.

2.9.6 Ao's Life and Her Works

Temsula Ao was born in October 1945 at Jorhat, Assam. She received her secondary education from Ridgeway Girls' High School (Assam) and completed her graduation and post-graduation from Fazl Ali College (Nagaland) and Gauhati University respectively. She is a member of the Ao subgroup of Nagaland, and has retired from North Eastern Hill University where she was a Professor at the Department of English. She served as the Director of North East Zone Cultural Centre (Dimapur) on deputation from NEHU from 1992-97. She was also a Fulbright Fellow to University of Minnesota during 1985-86. She received the Padma Shri Award in 2007, and the Governor's Gold Medal from the Government of Meghalaya in 2009. Along with Mamang Dai, she is widely respected as one of the major literary voices in English to emerge from Northeast India. Her poetic works include *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), and *Songs From the Other Life* (2007). She has published two short story collections as well: *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone (2006)* about the militancy in her native Nagaland, and *Laburnum for my Head* (2009) which has both mythical as well as modern overtones. The latter also won her the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013.

2.9.7 A Tiger-Woman's Prayer (Text)

O you powers of the earth and sky,
Who gave me this destiny
Tell me what is happening
Because I hear a new cadence
In the familiar steps
        That always stalk.
        Reminding me of my varied selves
Whether they be spirit,
        Human or beast.
O you capricious powers
Who fraught me thus
Why do you remain un-moved?

Can't you hear the urgency
In the tracking steps
And the sudden fear in my heart?
Which cautions me
My time is running out
Whether I be spirit, human or tiger.
Tell me what to do,
Run, skip or fly?
But my legs are leaden
With this un-shake-able burden
And the mounting fear
That even if I try
The stalking pairs will out-pace me
And will not relent
Until I reach the shore
Beyond the region
Of the setting sun.
O you powers above
All-knowing, all-seeing,
Pity my human plight
And enable me, just this once
To renounce these
Other selves
Straddling my troubled spirit
Since grandfather's tiger-soul
Came un-bidden to take control
And entangled my woman-self
In an un-seemly mesh
Of spirit, human and beast.
So I implore,
Grant me this last prayer
So that when I cross over
To the region
Beyond the sun
Like all others of my kind
The iridescent fumes

As per the Ao-Naga belief, the tiger which embodies the man or woman's spirit is no different in appearance from other tigers in the forest except that the particular animal has a strong sense of affinity and attachment to the person whose soul or spirit he is supposed to embody. This affinity is either inherited from an ancestor, or acquired through application to one who is reputed to be in possession of such power. If the applicant's prayer is to be granted, he will be offered a cup of wine or pipe of smoke by the person to whom he has appealed.

Of the last sunset
Will dissolve my several selves
Be they spirit, woman or tiger
And raise a rainbow there
Against our composite tears.

(*Songs From The Other Life*, 19-21)

Activities:

1. Try to interpret the term 'tiger-woman' and investigate whether it has anything to do with the Ao-Naga myth.
2. Consult a dictionary to find out the meanings of the word 'cadence.' Gloss the right word applicable to the context of the poem. How does the glossed meaning go with the word 'stalk?'
3. Trace the words in the poem that suggest 'movement' – particularly tigerly movement.
4. Consult any book on Rhetoric and Prosody and find out the term that refers to the poetic form of address (usually to absent persons and things). List the instances of such address used in the poem.
5. Identify the words or lines which suggest 'death.' How is death of a person envisaged? Is there any territorial reference?

2.9.8 Critical Understanding of the Text

In the poem taken up for discussion here, the speaking voice is that of an unnamed woman who senses that she is being stalked by the spirit of a tiger. Divided into eighteen stanzas of three lines each, the poem begins with an epilogue–probably keeping in mind those readers who are not acquainted with the relevant folklore of the region. It informs us that ''[A]ccording to an Ao-Naga myth certain individuals, men or women, possess familiar or companion spirits in the form of tigers.'' The first stanza is in the form of an apostrophe addressed to the 'powers of the earth and sky' that control all facets of her community life. Lately this woman has been hearing a 'new cadence in the familiar steps that always stalk' her – a development that fills her mind with an ominous feeling. Though destiny is often said to be set in stone, she pleads with the powers that be to spare her the yoke that has befallen her fate.

The fourth stanza again has her break into a vocative exclamation directed towards the 'capricious powers' who have decided to 'fraught' her with this obligation. Her perceptive faculties now greatly heightened, she can clearly 'hear the urgency in the tracking steps'

that fill her heart with 'sudden fear.' This feeling of trepidation makes her wonder aloud why these powers have remained 'un-moved' despite witnessing her misery. Even as the sense of panic grows, the warning that her 'time is running out' looms large, irrespective of whether she is a 'spirit, human or tiger.' Being a member of her tribe does bestow her with some knowledge about the mythical nature of this experience, yet she is unable to comprehend its full import. As a result, she appeals to these powers to show her a way out of this predicament–whether she should increase her 'pace,/ Run, skip or fly' in order to outstrip her pursuer. This show of boldness is, however, only momentary; in the very next stanza she is already in a resigned mood, conceding that her 'legs are laden/ With this un-shake-able burden.' Her lack of stamina, though, is not the only reason for this submissive attitude; there is an equally strong psychological angle to it. She admits that 'the mounting fear' of the 'stalking pairs' out-pacing her despite her valiant attempt weighs heavily on her mind as well. She is almost sure that they 'will not relent' until she is driven to 'the shore/ Beyond the region/ Of the setting sun', i.e. the end of her normal human existence.

Once more, the woman beseeches the 'all-knowing, all-seeing' powers that reside above to have pity on her 'human plight' and enable her to 'renounce these/ Other selves'. She realises that it is her 'grandfather's tiger-soul' that has come 'un-bidden to take control' of her 'woman-self.' In the process it has entangled her own self in an 'un-seemly mesh/ Of spirit, human and beast.' Towards the end of the poem, she implores these omniscient powers to grant her 'this last prayer' – when she like all others of her 'kind' crosses over to the region beyond the sun, the 'iridescent fumes/ Of the last sunset' would dissolve her several selves–be they spirit, woman or tiger. If allowed this last appeal, the rays of the setting sun would refract through the 'composite tears' shed at the culmination of her human existence and would create an ethereal rainbow. These concluding lines project a picture of sublime beauty. This is a welcome change from the consternation and perplexity of the earlier stanzas. Temsula Ao thus rounds off the poem on a relatively positive note with a prayer on the lips of her female protagonist. This simultaneously has a reassuring effect on her readers.

Right since the beginning of her writing career in the 1980s, Ao has utilized many images and themes from Naga folk culture in her works. She has drawn extensively on the native myth, rituals, and customary behaviour which persist despite the heavy inroads of Christianity and decades of restive discord after 1947 due to claims of Naga sovereignty. Her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* records the tribal belief of the tiger-souls (67). In an interpretation of several of these myths espoused in the essay "Folklore, Folk Ideas and Gender among the Nagas," Anungla Aier suggests that '[T]he creation stories of the

various tribes contain various elements that embrace the idea of women as the care giver or nurturer equating them with the mother earth while men are equated with the qualities of bravery and strength usually represented by various characters from the animal kingdom, especially the Tiger' (qtd. in Bender 112). The figure of the tiger also figures in the poem "The Man and the Tiger" by Yumlam Tana (1976-) which speaks about the Arunachalee concept of Man-Tiger brotherhood. Tales about tiger-man are aplenty in the folklores of the Lushais, the Bodos and the Garos as well.

2.9.9 Summing Up

The two poets discussed in this unit may be stringed together along two distinct threads– their use of English as poetic medium, and expressing their feminine selves. For Kamala Das, it was mostly a matter of choice that she decided to write primarily in English even though she was equally well-versed in her mother-tongue and had even written in Malayalam from time to time. The case of Ao, however, is vastly different, for although rich in oral tradition, her vernacular was devoid of a script, like most of the dialects of the North-East. No doubt, the pidgin languages (called Nagamese in Nagaland and Nefamese in Arunachal Pradesh) have served as the link languages in some of the multilingual hill states, yet they cannot quite substitute a full-fledged language with the potential to support a literature of its own. Tilottoma Misra informs us in her introduction to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from The North East India* that before the advent of identity politics amongst the various ethnic groups in the region, the writers from different communities used the Assamese language as the medium for creative writing. The situation has changed in recent years, and English has slowly but steadily become the *lingua franca* in the entire region. As she states, ''[A]t present, however, the new generation has accepted the prime position of English in the intellectual sphere of the country and would rather write in that universally powerful language than in their mother tongue or any of the Indian languages'' (xx). In her essay ''Crossing Linguistic Boundaries" Misra adds that such "works can claim a double parentage and are 'twice-born' ... in the true sense of the term because they belong both to the tradition" of their respective vernacular literature as well as to English which their writers have chosen to as vehicles of their thoughts (216).

Coupled with this politics of language is the issue of self-articulation. Kamala Das has been very vocal, perhaps even blunt, in her writings. She exposes the unenviable condition of a majority of Indian women caught in the grind in our patriarchal society. Ao is comparatively tempered in putting across her views. Instead of giving vent to her personal

beliefs in an assertive manner, she has decided to opt for the lyrical mode of composition to express the female poetic conscience in her poems.

2.9.10 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Analyse the autobiographical nature of Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction."
2. "An Introduction" can be read as the personal credo of its poetess – Comment.
3. Would you consider "An Introduction" as a feminist poem? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Would you classify "Remembrance" as a lyrical or political poem? Give reasons.
5. Consider "Remembrance" as a memory poem.
6. "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer" is representative of Temsula Ao's poetic oeuvre – Justify.
7. Consider "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer" as a poem rich in mythical resonances and community ethos.
8. Show how a deep sense of hurt and frustration lies beneath the aggressive facade in "An Introduction".

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Discuss the postcolonial features evident in "An Introduction."
2. What perceptions of nature do you find in Ao's poem? Do you find any apocalyptic vision here?
3. The female protagonist in Ao's poem is bestowed with a special status which, though, becomes a liability for her – Elaborate.
4. Explain the significance of the title of Temsula Ao's poem "A Tiger-Woman's Prayer."

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Analyse the speaker's attitude towards her family members and acquaintances in Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction."
2. How does the narrator in Kamala Das's poem overcome her personal setbacks and emerge true to her feminine self towards the end of "An Introduction"?
3. The laconic stanza-formation in Ao's poem is in tune with the hurried pace of its speaking voice. – Analyse.
4. What picture of the speaker does emerge in Temsula Ao's poem?

2.9.11 Suggested Readings

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Notes

Notes

Module - 3

Reading Indian English Fiction

Unit - 10 ❐ Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction

Structure

3.10.1 Objectives

This unit will trace the trajectory of the history of the development of Indian English Fiction, focusing chiefly on the changing trends and patterns of writing fiction from the pre-independence period to the year 1980. We shall come to know about the thematic contents and various modes of writing fiction. This unit will also discuss the contribution of the significant novelists to this genre. After reading this unit, the learners will be able to have an overall understanding of Indian English fiction.

3.10.2 Introduction

Indian English Novel gained momentum and became important as a genre during the 1930s with the appearance of three major novelists in the literary scene: Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. These novelists laid a very strong foundation to this genre and in the post-colonial phase many Indian novelists emulated the style and diction of their novels. Indeed, in the post-independence period, this genre developed in a rapid pace as writers from different regions of India wrote fictions that were significant from the perspectives of theme and technique. This genre now has become globally recognised and it has assumed a huge dimension in the post-liberalisation era mainly due to the international circulation of many Indian English novels and also because of the fact that some of these fictions have been adapted into films.

Activities:

1. What was the first Indian English novel?
2. Prepare a list of the novels written by Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand.

3.10.3 Pre-independence Indian English Fiction

Unlike the genre of the Indian English Poetry which flourished during the 19th century, Indian English Novel could not grow till the beginning of 20th century. Indian English novel appeared as a mature genre much later than the other forms of writing (Naik 106). Though the reasons for this late emergence of Indian English Fiction are not known, one may consider certain factors which could have impeded the development of Indian English Fiction in the 19th century. During the 19th century, the Indian writers were immensely influenced by the English Romanticism. This could be one reason for the dominance of Indian English Poetry in the 19th century and for the neglect of other genres. In the 19th century, novels were mostly published in serialised versions in different newspapers, and this was mainly done because the Indian publishing houses, at that time, were not very confident about the reception of fiction. For instance, one may refer to the first Indian English Novel, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), which was published serially in a weekly magazine. This novel, as a complete book, was finally published in 1935. Before the publication of this novel, two earlier stories, which Naik remarks are not 'novels proper' but 'earliest fictional efforts,' were published in journals. Kylash Chander Dutt's *A Journal of 48 hours of the Year 1945* was published in *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* on 6 June 1835 and Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century* was published in *Saturday Evening Hurkaru* on 25 May 1845 (Naik 106). These facts clearly establish the view that Indian publishing industry during the 19th century was highly sceptical about the reception of fiction. However, during this period, many English journals and periodicals were published which were of interest to the English knowing reading public. Naik even mentions that some of the novels written by the writers from Bengal and Madras during the period (1860s to 1900) were not published in India, but in London (106). Shevantibai M. Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife,* Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta, or The History of a Bengal Raiyat* and Ram Krishna Punt's *The Boy of Bengal* were published in London in 1895, 1874 and 1866 respectively. Thus, the journey of Indian English Novel in the 19th century was not remarkable from the point of view of reception, despite the fact that most of the novelists wrote fictions which were socially and historically relevant. In fact, most of these fictions, as the titles indicate, are character based fictions. These fictions, by contextualising the main characters within a particular social and historical background, attempt to imitate the genre of 'bildungsroman' which became popular in the 18th and the 19th century Britain. These Indian novelists of the 19th century, as Naik observes, imitated the models of "the eighteenth and the nineteenth British fiction, particularly Defoe, Fielding and Scott" (107).

With the beginning of the 20th century, Indian English novels started gaining significance. Novelists like Sarath Kumar Ghosh from Bengal, A. Madhaviah and T. Ramakrishna Pillai from Madras, and Sirdar Jogendra Singh from Punjab are some of the prominent figures (Naik 108). Sarath Kumar Ghosh wrote a fantasy fiction, *Verdict of the Gods*, which was published from New York in 1905 (Naik 108). Later, he wrote a realistic fiction, *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*, which was published from London in 1909 (Naik 108). This fiction is based on the life of a "Rajput prince of the later nineteenth century" and it is one of the "earliest fictional attempts to deal with East-West relationship, an oft-repeated theme in the Indian English novel" (Naik 108). A. Madhaviah wrote an autobiographical novel, *Thillai Govindan*, which was published from London in 1916 (Naik 108). This novel depicts the character of a young south Indian Brahmin, who "under the impact of western education" loses his faith in his own religion, but ultimately he regains his faith after he reads *The Gita* (Naik 108). Madhaviah wrote another novel, *Clarinda*, which was published from Madras in 1915 (Naik 108). *Clarinda* "is a historical romance dealing with the career of a woman Christian convert of Tanjore'' (Naik 108). T. Ramakrishna Pillai wrote two historical romances, *Padmini* (1903) and *A Dive for Death* (1911). Both these novels were published from London (Naik 108). These novels written by Pillai follow the style and manner of Walter Scott's historical novels (Naik 108). Sidar Jogendra Singh wrote four novels, *Nur Jahan, The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), *Nasrin, An Indian Medley* (1911), *Kamla* (1925) and *Kamini* (1931). Three out of these four novels were published from London and one from Lahore (Naik 108-109). *Nur Jahan* and *Nasrin* are historical novels, whereas, *Kamala* and *Kamini* are social fictions (Naik 109). Thus, the novelists who wrote in the early decades of the 20th century enriched the field of Indian English Novel by writing fictions of various types. Historical novels, social fictions, autobiographical fictions and historical romances became prominent types of fictions in the first two decades of the 20th century. Another noteworthy fact is the dependence of the novelists of this period on the foreign press. Most of the novels were published from London which again brings to our attention the lack of interest of the native press in publishing novels. However, the scenario in the field of Indian English Fiction changed during the period of 'Gandhian Whirlwind.' This period (1920-1947) is the most productive period in the field of fiction. In fact, fiction emerged as a dominant genre during this period due to the contributions of three major novelists: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Before we discuss the contribution of these three novelists, mention must be made of three other novelists who are not very popular like Anand, Narayan and Rao. K. S. Venkataramani, A. S. P. Ayyar and Krishnaswamy Nagarajan are contemporaries of Anand, Narayan and Rao. Venkataramani wrote two

novels, *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932). These novels can be considered as Gandhi novels, because Venkataramani refers to the "Gandhian economics" in his first novel, and in the second the narrative is about "the 1930s Civil Disobedience movement" (Mehrotra 169-170). Ayyar's novels, *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* (1939) explore the ancient history of India. In both the novels, he narritivises the lives of the great Indian kings of the past (Naik 154). Nagarajan's novels, *Athavar House* (1937) and *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961) are set in the South Indian background (Naik 154). Thus, in the novels of Venkataramani, Ayyar and Nagarjun, representation of the social reality is an important phenomenon. Venkataramani and Nagarajan have dealt with the socio-cultural contexts of the 1930s and after, whereas, Ayyar has gone back to the past to fictionalise the real lives of the great Indian kings. However, as mentioned earlier, the contribution of these three novelists in the 1920s and the 1930s, is shadowed by the immense contribution of the 'major trio' (Naik 155): Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. They were definitely concerned with the issues that became relevant during the period of "Gandhian whirlwind," and they have also attempted to represent Gandhi and his philosophy. In fact, Anand, Rao and Narayan capture the spirit of their age by representing the changing face of India during the period when the whole country was slowly preparing for a strong anti-colonial struggle. Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), and Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) are such novels where one can locate the India of the 1930s. Thus, realistic representation of the society is a distinctive feature of their novels. Anand's novels, as Leela Gandhi opines, are "experiments with social realism" and they effectively capture the "complex alliances, misalliances, transformations, and failures of the Indian national movement" (Mehrotra 178). Unlike Anand, Narayan's realism is blended with irony. He is, according to K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "a master of comedy" whose world of fiction does not simply offer a "delicately self-adjusted mechanism of ironic comedy, but rather the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty, peace" (384-385). Rao's realism is of a different kind as he wrote mainly from a philosophical point of view. In fact, *Kanthapura* is the only novel that Rao wrote before the independence of India. His later novels, written after 1947, are mainly philosophical fictions which deal with religious ideas. Rao's realism is therefore derived from his intense philosophical learning, which obviously, sets him apart from Anand and Narayan. Thus, in the pre-independence phase, Anand, Rao and Narayan enriched the genre by writing such fictions which were important from the changing perspectives of the nation. Their novels not only read the nation, but also offer a critical insight into the various trends of thoughts that were relevant during the period of "Gandhian Whirlwind." Anand, Rao and Narayan influenced the novelists of the post-independence era.

3.10.4 Post-independence Indian English Fiction (1947-1980)

As mentioned earlier, Anand, Rao and Narayan wrote fictions both before and after the independence of India. After 1947, the 'major trio' of the 1930s had become established writers, and many budding novelists attempted to follow their style and pattern of writing. Among the early fiction writers, in the post-1947 phase, who tried to write realistic fiction following the model of Anand are: Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh (Naik 213). Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947) "was published in October 1947, soon after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan" (Iyengar 412). This novel realistically portrays the scenario of Bengal during the Quit India movement by symbolically using hunger as a trope. The impact of the Bengal famine (which occurred in the year 1943) on the lives of the innocent people has been effectively captured by Bhattacharya in this novel. Bhattacharya's novels are Bengal-centric, and like his first novel, his later novels portray the lives of Bengali characters that are in a state of crisis. Malgonkar is a realist of a different kind. His novels, as Iyengar remarks, reveal "a sound historical sense" (434). Concern for the lives of the ancient Indian princes and a better understanding of the idea of nation are two very important features of his novels. Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) are two such novels which exhibit the concerns mentioned above. *A Bend in the Ganges* is a significant novel because it is set against the backdrop of Partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a famous Partition fiction. In this novel, "Partition is represented as an event which the simple villagers – who have lived peaceably together regardless of religious differences – cannot fathom" (Mehrotra 220). Khuswant Singh's novels are about the Punjabis, especially the Sikhs who live in the border area of the nation. Apart from Bhattacharya, Malgonkar and Singh, novelists like S. Menon Marath and Balachandra Rajan also wrote realist fictions. Like Bhattacharya, Marath's novels are based on regional realities. His novels, as Naik observes, are "rooted in the soil of his native Kerala" (221). Rajan, like the contemporary novelists of the 1950s and the 1960s, wrote realist fictions, but "his realism," as Naik mentions, "is less social than psychological" (221). Thus, we can see that in the first two decades after independence, the trend of writing realist fictions gained momentum. In fact, as we know, this trend became prominent in the writings of Anand, Rao and Narayan. The novelists of the post-independence era developed the tradition of realist fiction by making it more interesting from the points of view of humour, characterisation and plot construction. Also, the theme of Partition became prominent in some of the fictions written during this period. Following the trend of Narayan's Malgudi novels, writers like Bhattacharya and Menon

Marath became important for projecting a particular locale in their novels. However, in the post-1947 era, some novelists deviated from the trend of writing realist fictions, and focused chiefly on producing experimental fictions. This is a significant development in the post-independence Indian English Novel. The first kind of experimental fiction was written by G.V. Desani. His *All About H. Hatterr* (1948; revised edition 1972) is "a simple exercise in modernist word-mongering, ... sort of Joycean linguistic burlesque" (Mehrotra 187). Using a very complex theme and technique, Desani's novel is remarkable for the humour and the chaos that define the narrative of a trickster named, Hatterr (Naik 226, 227 & 228). Like Desani, Sudhindra Nath Ghosh also wrote experimental fictions. His four novels are interesting experiments in storytelling method (Naik 222). In fact, Ghosh uses the native tradition of storytelling method found in the puranas and the ancient epics to narrate the tale of the central protagonists in his novels (Naik 226).

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, the course of Indian English Fiction changed because of the contribution of some very prominent women novelists. These novelists added new dimensions in the field of fiction by writing stories which were important from the perspective of modern Indian women. Before discussing the contribution of these women novelists, mention must be made of two important novelists of the 1960s and 1970s: Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. Arun Joshi's novels are about alienated heroes who are "intensely self-centred persons prone to self pity and escapism" (Naik 229). Another significant trait in his novels is the East-West encounter (Naik 230). Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) is a novel where both the aspects mentioned above are present. The East-West encounter is also a prominent aspect in Nahal's fictions. His novel, *Into Another Dawn* (1977) is about a character named, Ravi Sharma who experiences the typical cultural clash in his mind. Nahal's, *Azadi* (1975) is remarkable because it captures the spirit of Partition by presenting a narrative that is the "most comprehensive fictional accounts of the Partition holocaust in Indian English literature" (Naik 232). Among the women novelists of this period, four are important: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. These novelists primarily deal with the socio-cultural and the psychological conditions of the women living in India. In their novels, the women characters often occupy the centrestage to voice their protest against the male dominated society. Thus, feminist concerns become important in the novels written by the four women writers in particular. However, as individual writers, they are different, because they have also dealt with some other important issues which must be discussed briefly. Jhabvala wrote eight novels which can be categorised into two distinct groups: "comedies of urban middle class Indian life" and "ironic studies of the East-West encounter" (Naik 234). Her novels are interesting studies of different

facets of human relationship (Naik 233). The East-West encounter is an important aspect in Markandaya's novels also, but "her strengths as a novelist lie in her depiction of human relationships" (Mehrotra 187). In fact, the rural-urban divide is very prominent in her novels, and she also attempts to show the impact of modern industrialisation on the rural community. Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) very effectively captures this aspect. Sahgal's novels are political in nature, but her major concerns are "modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self realization" (Naik 239). Desai's novels are women centric and they capture the inner world of the female characters. In her fictions, women are alienated subjects who ruminate on the various ways they have been subjugated by the patriarchal society.

Therefore, we see that during the 1960s and the 1970s, the genre of Indian English Fiction incorporated many new trends and themes of writing. These new forms of writing made it more rich and dynamic. One very noteworthy feature is the rise of women fiction which started gaining momentum during this period. The Partition theme, experimental forms of writing, the East-West encounter, feminist narratives and the different facets of realism – all these features broadened the scope of Indian English Fiction to make it more acceptable and inclusive.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of the pre-independence Indian English novelists. What are the common features you find in their novels?
2. Prepare a list of the important post-independence Indian English novelists. What are the distinctive traits you find in the fictions of this period?
3. Do you think that the women novelists like Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala et al changed the course of Indian English Novel? How are they different from their male counterparts?
4. Read the following novels: Anand's *The Untouchable*, Rao's *Kanthapura* and R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*. Can you locate any common feature in these novels? Do you note any difference in the attitude of the writers of these three novels?
5. Prepare a list of the novels that deal with the theme of Partition. How do these Partition novels represent the nation?

3.10.5 Summing Up

The unit traces the birth of the Indian English novel early in the nineteenth century, then proceeds to show how it gained a strong foothold around 1930s, and how it gained

maturity to experiment with form and content from around 1970s. It also covers discussion of the novels written by diasporic writers.

3.10.6 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English novelists. How have these novelists enriched the genre of Indian English Novel?
2. Comment on the Indian English novels that dealt with the Partition of India.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. How did the contribution of Anand, Rao and R.K. Narayan change the whole scenario of Indian English Fiction? Discuss with suitable references from their novels.
2. How did the women novelists of the post-independence era contribute to the genre of Indian English Fiction? Discuss with suitable references to their novels.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Briefly explain the significance of the experimental novels in the genre of Indian English Fiction.
2. How is Arun Joshi as a novelist different from his contemporaries?

3.10.7 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 11 ❐ R. K. Narayan : *The English Teacher*

Structure

3.11.1 Objectives

In this unit, R.K. Narayan's novel *The English Teacher* will be discussed. It will familiarise you with Narayan's creative world in general and the novel (prescribed in your syllabus) in particular. It will give you some idea about his location in the history of Indian English novel. Different critical aspects of the novel including Narayan's artistry will be discussed in the unit.

3.11.2 Introduction

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan (1906-2001) is one of the most celebrated Indian English novelists, short story writers and essayists. He is one of the 'major trio' (the other two being Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao) who appeared 'on the scene' of the Indian English fiction writing in the 1930s (Naik 155). These three writers, as you know, dominated the Indian English literary scene for decades. You also know that Narayan's fame, like that of his two peers, transcended the national boundary. His works were

widely accepted and appreciated by readers across the globe. Many of his creative works have been translated in Indian and foreign languages. Some of his works (e.g. *The Guide*) have also been adapted into films and television series. His contribution to literature has been acknowledged both in India and abroad. In India he won the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship (1996). He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha for a term. Outside India, the British Royal Society conferred on him A. C. Benson Medal; he was awarded in the USA the English Speaking Union Book Award and was made a Fellow of American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1982).

Speaking of Narayan, Graham Greene, in his Introduction to *Bachelor of Arts*, comments that "he has offered me a second home." Greene contrasted Narayan's representation of India with those of Kipling and E. M. Forster and feels that "[n]o one could find a second home in Kipling's India or Forster's India" as their representations do not appear convincing. Narayan's novels and short stories offer 'homely' comfort not only to the foreign readers but also to the Indian readers who might find their images and their values reflected in his works. For a foreign reader like Greene who encouraged and supported the young Indian writer, Narayan is an 'insider,' with an insider's knowledge of the country and its cultures. And Narayan, unlike Forster, never thought of India as a "muddle" or confusion, neither in material nor in spiritual terms. We need to examine how Narayan presents India and the Indians (as well as foreigner/s) in *The English Teacher* which is in your syllabus.

3.11.3 R. K. Narayan: Life and Works

Son of a school teacher, Narayan belonged to a middle class Tamil Brahmin family. His name – Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan – was given in accordance with Tamil cultural tradition. Ranga Rao's explanation helps us understand the custom: "Until recently the Tamil Brahmin names were three-in-ones. First the village, then the father's name, followed by the given name of the individual" (11). 'Rashipuram' is the name of Narayan's ancestral village in Tamilnadu while 'Krishnaswamy' was derived from his father's name: Krishnaswamy Iyer. 'Narayan' is the name given to him.

Narayan's family, like many other families of his social background, was caught between contrary cultural pulls: invasive British culture and traditional Indian culture(s). The attraction of the European 'modernity' was paramount. The English education system and the English language had great appeal for members of this emerging class. Narayan's father himself was "a member of the new class, the rising English-educated middle-

class of India," one who moved away from the ancestral roots to the princely state of Mysore (Rao 12). Yet he retained his passion for native cultural traditions. He was a "lover of Karnataka music and offered hospitality to visiting maestros" (Rao 11). Narayan may have received his love of the English language and literature from his father. His maternal grandfather, an Anglicised government official, and his maternal uncles had their influence on him. Narayan was raised by his maternal grandmother who imbibed in him the sense of humanism and benevolence, of commitment and discipline.

His early education began at a rather "severe missionary school in Madras" where he "encountered the English language" at the age of five. He was made to recognise in the school the letters of the English alphabet from a glossy primer imported from England: "A was an Apple Pie. B bit it. C cut it" (Mishra 193). For an uninitiated Indian child the lesson generated confusion. As Mishra observes, "Narayan could see what B and C had been up to; but the identity of A eluded him. He had never seen an apple before, not to mention a pie. The teacher, who hadn't seen an apple either, wondered if it wasn't like idli – the South Indian rice-cake" (193). At the age of sixteen Narayan left Madras and came to Mysore to live with his family. He pursued his education in Mysore University but was not very successful. He even failed in his B.A. examination once. He ultimately graduated in 1930.

Narayan was a product of mixed cultures. Despite having an exposure to British influences, he, however, retained his rootedness in Indian values, and spiritual and mystical traditions. You will find enough evidence of this in *The English Teacher*. His translations of Tamil *Ramayana* (1972) and *Mahabharata* (1978) provide further proofs. Narayan grew up reading literary works of well-known Western (mainly British) authors. He read Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Pope, Marlowe, Tolstoy, Wordsworth, Byron, Hardy, Browning, Dickens, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli, Moliere, besides trying Carlyle, Ruskin and Walter Pater as well. He came across English magazines like *Little Folks, Nineteenth Century and After, Cornhill, Boys' Own Paper*, *Strand*, *Mercury* and *The Spectator*.

Narayan took a teaching job for a brief period but felt that he should opt for a more independent, although uncertain, profession of a writer, and hence left the job. Initially, his works were repeatedly rejected by publishers. Graham Greene played an important role in the publication of *Swami and His Friends*. After the initial setbacks, Narayan became quite successful in his writing career. Primarily known as a novelist, he tried his hand at several genres. Given below is a list of his selected works:

Novels:

Swami and Friends. 1935. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2002; *The Bachelor of Arts*. 1937. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 112). The *Dark Room*. 1938. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2000; *The English Teacher*. 1946. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1989; *Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi*. 1949. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1974; *Waiting for the Mahatma*. 1955. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1999; *The Guide*. 1958. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1991; *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. 1962. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983; *The Vendor of Sweets*. 1967. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 2001; *A Tiger for Malgudi*. 1983. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1983; *The World of Nagaraj*. 1990. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1990;

Short Stories:

Malgudi Days. 1943. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1944 and *Lawley Road and Other Stories*. 1956. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1956.

Essays:

A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays: 1958-1988. 1988. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988.

Activities:

1. Which works by Kipling and Forster are mentioned by Graham Greene? Consult your history of English literature book to find out the theme of the works, and then state why Greene mentions them in relation to Narayan's works.
2. The list of Narayan's works given above is not exhaustive. Prepare a list of the works not mentioned above. What works did he write in other genres?
3. Gather some basic information about Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who are the two other members of the 'major trio'?

3.11.4 Section-wise Summary

The English Teacher (1946) was published in the United States of America as *Grateful to Life and Death*. It is third of a trilogy (the other two being *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*) and is largely autobiographical. It has reflections on how Narayan himself felt after his wife Rajam's death. Narayan records the protagonist Krishna's coming to terms with his wife Susila's death and his realization of the need for an individual's spiritual understanding of life and death. The novel also offers vivid details of Krishna's disenchantment with the education system under the British rule.

The novel has eight chapters. Given below is the substance of the chapters. This will help you understand the development of the plot of the novel and growth of the characters. But remember that this is in no way a substitute for the reading of the novel between the lines.

Chapter One

Krishna, the protagonist of the novel, is the 'English teacher' at Albert Mission College. The first chapter of the book offers us a scintillating picture of his life at the college hostel and his experience of teaching at the college. He compares his uneventful life with that of a "cow" (10) – eating, teaching, walking, doing all the usual works but with "a sense of something missing" (1). He has to go through the daily rigmarole of reading Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare, examining students' composition papers, 'admonishing, cajoling and browbeating' students to 'mug up' important authors and be successful in examinations (2). He earns one hundred rupees for performing these duties. He is also a poet and this perhaps explains his disenchantment with such a boring life. He is married and his wife Susila has been living in her father's house with her new born daughter Leela. He receives a letter from his father informing him that he should settle down to a proper family life now. His father also informs him that 'the tenth of the next month' was the 'most auspicious day' for the arrival of his wife and daughter. He is now caught between the free, unencumbered life of one living in a hostel and the prospect of a domestic life, full of responsibilities. He feels really shaken. He, however, manages to rent a house at Sarayu Street. Shortly thereafter, he shifts to this newly rented house.

Chapter Two

Krishna has been busy in properly arranging the rooms in his new house. His mother arrives from the village to help him. She has her own 'house-keeping philosophy' and practices. Krishna is, however, afraid of how she will measure his wife according to the norms of this philosophy. On the appointed day he waits at the station with great anxiety for his wife and baby to arrive. Although he has engaged a coolie promising the latter three times of the usual wages, he has the apprehension that the huge number of luggage cannot be unloaded from the train within the stipulated time. However, everything is managed properly. Susila, his wife, and Leela, his child, are welcomed home with proper rites and rituals. After helping her son's family settle down, Krishna's mother leaves for her village home. Krishna gets immersed in the family life with all its weal and woe. They have their hours of joy as well as hours of discords over trifles, but they make a happy family. The arrival of an old lady sent by Krishna's mother for helping the family relieves them of much responsibility.

Chapter Three

Krishna's father wants to provide him money for buying or building a house in Malgudi. Both Krishna and Susila decide to visit Lawley Extension 'to choose a house or site' for the purpose (74). On their way, they have lunch at a restaurant called Bombay Ananda Bhavan. They walk along the river happily and dream of going on tours to different places in India and Europe. At last they take a *jutka* and arrive at their destination. They choose a house with a lush green field of corn around. Here Susila is traumatised after visiting an unhygienic lavatory. She contacts typhoid and becomes seriously ill. All efforts to cure her go in vain and she dies. Henceforth, life becomes meaningless to Krishna.

Chapter Four

His wife's death has made Krishna disinterested in life. His daughter is his only solace. He looks after the child and rejects the suggestion of his parents or parents-in-law for taking care of the child. Krishna observes, "I cared for little else. I felt a thrill of pride whenever I had to work and look after the child. It seemed a noble and exciting occupation" (151). The child is not informed of her mother's death lest it affects her life. Taking care of the child becomes the be-all-and-end-all of Krishna's life.

Chapter Five

Krishna finds his academic duties very boring. His behaviour with his students borders on aggression. In the midst of such a hopeless situation, he receives a letter from a stranger who informs him that he has communication from the spirit of Susila — she wants to interact with Krishna. Krishna rushes to meet the stranger who lives in a village situated not far from the town. His house appears to be a 'green haven.' This stranger acts as a medium and Krishna interacts with the spirit of his wife. She says that she is very happy in her new place. She also refers to the old days and mentions that there are fourteen undestroyed letters in a sandalwood casket in the house which he should search. In the meantime, Leela's nanny informs Krishna that the child has developed interest in a school in the neighbourhood. The little girl starts going to school where everybody learns while playing. The headmaster appears to be an unusual person.

Chapter Six

The school is open on Sundays even. Krishna visits the school with her daughter. The headmaster suffers from sleeplessness and devotes the time devising stories for the school children. Krishna feels proud to learn that his daughter has left her mark through her creative activities. The headmaster believes in simplicity and hates luxury. He feels that the "main business of an education institution is to shape the mind and character" of the students (203). Krishna sees how much interested the students are in listening to the

stories. The headmaster dines with them at Krishna's house and Krishna finds him a very fascinating person, although a bit eccentrie. After having food and rest, all of them go to the headmaster's house. His children are wild and his wife is rude. Later he informs him that she is disgusted with him as he had left his parents' luxurious house and property and started teaching children. He now believes that he knows the exact time of his death as per an astrologer's prediction.

Chapter Seven

As his friend, the medium , has been out of the town for quite some time, Krishna misses the seance sessions. Consequently, his foul mood returns. His friend writes to him, requesting Krishna to try to communicate with Susila through him in absentia. The experiment is successful. She also advises him to try to communicate with her independently. His initial attempts to do so fails but is successful after some time.

One night, at an unusual hour, the headmaster appears at Krishna's house. He has been in an extremely agitated state. He requests the latter to take charge of his school, or at least keep an eye on it, as he strongly feels that this is the last day in his life. Early next morning Krishna visits his house but does not find him. He then tells the headmaster's wife about the astrologer's prediction. She breaks down at the information. Then they find him at the school, hale and hearty. The headmaster is glad that the prediction has not come true. All persuasion from his wife to return home proves futile as he decides to stay at the school. A new life of *sanyasa* begins for him.

A new cheerfulness begins in Krishna's life following successful communion with Sushila. His mother in the meantime visits him. Leela's future is now ensured because her grandparents on both sides have set aside adequate money for her. Leela leaves with Krishna's mother to the village home. This makes Krishna lonely. She starts writing to him in her child's handwriting. Krishna visits his village and finds Leela very happy there. Returning to his place, Krishna finds solace in his involvement in the school and in the headmaster's company.

Chapter Eight

Krishna is now in search of a 'harmonious existence' (369). He decides that "everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work" (269). He has to snap all 'familiar roots' (269). Initially he thinks of sending his resignation letter to Mr. Brown. But then he writes a short formal letter of resignation and meets the Principal. Despite the latter's persuasion, he sticks to his decision, asserting that his 'work' as an 'English teacher' does not please his 'innermost self.' The college gives

him 'a grand send-off.' Coming home, he finds peace in the fragrance of the garland he is offered at the ceremony and calls out for his deceased wife several times and falls into drowsiness. When he wakes up, he finds Shusila sitting by his side 'with an extraordinary smile in her eyes' (279). He offers her the garland and she is very pleased. A cock crows at the breaking of the dawn and they stand together at the window, gazing outside. "A cool breeze lapped our faces. The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy — a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death" (280). With this note of transcendence, the novel ends.

Activities:

1. What is the title of the American version of *The English Teacher?*
2. Write down the names of the members of Krishna's family, their relationships with one another, and the places where they live. Draw a family tree.
3. Find page no. 16 and note down the kinds of mistakes ('the traps that the English language sets for foreigners') mentioned there. Are you aware of these 'traps'?
5. Mention the names of Krishna's colleagues. Has he mentioned names of some students? If so, write down their names as well.
6. Make a list of all the authors, books and magazines mentioned in Chapter One. Which book on history of English literature is mentioned in Chapter One?
7. Describe the journey of Krishna and Shusila to Lawley Estate. In this connection, map the city and its outskirt as far as possible. Take help of all the other descriptions of the landscape in the city and the outskirts (e.g. page nos. 30 and 76).
8. Find for yourself whether the Headmaster and Krishna's friend, one who acts as the medium, have been given any name. If not, why?

3.11.5 Critical Understanding of the Text

3.11.5.1 The Role of Family

Two distinct areas stand out in R. K. Narayan's novel *The English Teacher*: Indian family as a social unit and the education system in British India. In this section we shall analyse how Narayan presents the Indian family system while narrating the story of the protagonist Krishna.

The novel was published immediately before the independence of India. (Dear learner, check the year of publication on your own). Indian family structure was at a crucial

juncture at that time. English education had by then already produced a good number of English-educated middle-class people willing to take up jobs of teachers, 'writers' (clerks) and other positions in administration. Joining these jobs meant leaving the joint families in the villages and coming to cities in great numbers. In *The English Teacher* we find Krishna, the protagonist, doing the same. Himself a product of the British education in India, Krishna's father provided his children with proper education. Hence both his children are now well-educated and employed in prestigious positions. Consequently, they leave their ancestral place and set up their nuclear families in the places of their work (Malgudi and Hyderabad).

Krishna stays in the small town of Malgudi by the side of the river Sarayu. A former student of Albert Mission College, he has left his village home to take up the job of teaching in the same college. His parents live in his ancestral village. His wife Susila lives with his parents-in-law as she has given birth to her daughter Leela. This has been a social convention in India. Although he lives separately at Malgudi, he is in close touch with his parents and parents-in-law. The network of familial relationship is very strong. His father is the ultimate decision maker and communicates his decisions through letters. He writes to Krishna that it is high time for the latter to set his own family. Krishna's father-in-law brings Shusila and her daughter to Malgudi for this purpose. His mother also visits Krishna's rented house and stays with them for some time in order to set the household properly. So setting up the family is not the sole responsibility of Krishna and his wife. Both his parents and parents-in-law help in this respect because it is held to be the responsibility of the entire family. So a community spirit within a hierarchical structure is evident throughout the novel. It is best displayed during the period of Shusila's illness. Everybody is anxious and tries his or her best to relieve her pain or Krishna's sufferings. The child is taken care of. When Shusila breathes her last, the entire family faces the ordeal together as a unit. Krishna's parents later take the responsibility of bringing up the daughter. His father-in-law also sets apart adequate money for her future. So we get a picture of a strong filial network in operation.

His elder brother stays in Hyderabad with his own family. His wife, the daughter of a retired High Court judge, is not in the best of terms with his parents. Hence there is practically no contact between them. The role of the wives is supposed to be very crucial in keeping the family bond strong. If they refuse to conform to the household norms or prefer to defy the authority of the mother-in-law, the relationship is sure to sour. A wife must also be capable of taking charge of the household and learn the tricks of the trade from her mother-in-law. Shusila is a very suitable wife from that point of view.

Once they are alone, Krishna and Shusila strike excellent relationship. She takes charge of every detail of the house, including the financial one. Their daughter grows up in a healthy family environment. Krishna encourages his wife to read and write, and not just spend her entire time in the kitchen or taking care of the baby. Their love prospers until she becomes fatally ill and dies. This leaves Krishna a totally dejected person and he even thinks of suicide. The thought of his daughter keeps him alive. The responsibility of his daughter is ultimately taken up by his parents, thus making him free to abdicate his material responsibilities. He now resigns from his job and moves towards a life free from narrow considerations. His union with the spirit of his wife in the last chapter of the novel elevates the conjugal relationship to a spiritual level. It "bridge[s] the gulf between life and after-life" (166) which is, as spirits said earlier, the purpose for their communication. Krishna and Shusila achieves that condition at the end of the novel.

3.11.5.2 Title of the Novel

R. K. Narayan's novel *The English Teacher* is, as its title indicates, is about an 'English Teacher' — Krishna. He teaches English in Albert Mission College in Malgudi. The novel is about his life and career, his relationship with his wife, his experimentation with the spirit of his deceased wife, and his transcendence from a mundane, material existence to a spiritual one, an existence that relies on 'psychic development' (132) and 'inner peace' (277).

I shall not describe this development here as it has already been described in the chapter-wise analysis of the story. You have to collect relevant parts from there to form a clear idea about this.

We, however, need to focus on the fact that Krishna's profession, that of an 'English teacher' has been foregrounded in the title. This requires a special analysis here because Krishna has described in detail the environment prevailing in his college, how he feels frustrated by his usual day-to-day academic activities and how he criticises the education system in British India and how he seeks a way out to find a new one. So right from the beginning he is against an education policy that is essentially materialist in nature and that depends on 'mugg[ing] up Shakespeare and Milton,' reproducing them in examinations and 'secur[ing] high marks' (2). Such an education depends on the objective of securing high marks and be successful. There is no scope for the development of a student's imaginative and creative faculties. Hence he allies with the headmaster and helps in the latter's initiative to introduce a novel methodology of teaching. In this new system the students will learn while enjoying the process. They will get enough scope for imagination and experimentation. It will not rely on the objective of success but on the vision of

being true human being with faculties for inner development. (You, dear learner, should take relevant portions from the next section for a fuller exploration of the topic).

The title thus hints only one part of the protagonist's life and leaves out the later part. But as an ironic tool, it suggests the meaninglessness of the duties of an 'English teacher' (the phrase itself refers to the popular use of the practitioner of this profession). The 'English teacher' in question here thus finally abdicates his duty in favour of a more serious pursuit of inner peace and joy which is missing in the mainstream education system.

3.11.5.3 Narayan's Representation of the Education System

There is a severe criticism of the contemporary education system in *The English Teacher*. Krishna, the protagonist who is also the narrator, criticises the system right from the beginning. Since he is a teacher of English literature and language, his criticism is basically channelised through how English is taught at the college. The core of his criticism is that the education system is basically mechanical and materialist and is practised through mindless 'teaching' and 'learning' exercises. Taking attendance, for example, takes up most of the time of a 'period' in a classroom. In the chaos prevailing in the classroom, the bored teachers often wait eagerly for the bell to ring which announces the end of the period. There is hardly any scope for exercise of imagination in the prevailing system. Students learn with dogged determination to 'secure high marks' sans any pleasure.

Krishna is critical of the system right from the beginning. He narrates how Mr. Brown, the Principal of the college, is shocked at the fact that a student of English Honours does not know how to spell the word 'Honours'— the student has dropped the vowel 'u.' He is disgusted because the mistake violates the purity of the English language. Krishna feels that "there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel" (3). In the colonial system purity of the English language was given top priority and Krishna's irritation gives vent to the idea that in a colonial situation hybridity is inevitable and mistakes like the above are not cardinal ones. By the hindsight we can even say that the boy's 'mistake' is an accepted form of spelling — in the American English. This is also mentioned later in the text. Language learning is also a reciprocal exercise in a colonial situation. Krishna thus criticises Brown's inability to express even a small sentence like "The cat chases the rat" in "any of the two hundred Indian languages" (4). The very existence of the English Department, according to him, depends on "dotting the i's and crossing the t's" (5).

The students hardly find any pleasure in enjoying a poem or any piece of literary writing. They read a text or listen to a lecture as part of their duty of being 'educated.' Hence most of the time they are unresponsive. Krishna sums up the general situation in the classroom in the following way:

> the grim tolerance with which boys listen to poetry, the annotator's desperate effort to convey a meaning, and the teacher's doubly desperate effort to wrest a meaning out of the poet and the annotator, the essence of an experience lost in all this handling….. (9)

The materials the students have to mug up (e.g. history of literature) appear to Krishna as 'nonsense' and even 'literary garbage.' He believes "that they are being fed on literary garbage and that we are all the paid servants of the garbage department" (226). He is fed up with the rituals of the 'false education,' with the "dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories" (270). In his opinion, examinations and 'critical notes' have largely replaced literature. What the students really need is "lessons in the fullest use of the mind" (270). He injects a nationalist, anti-colonial stance when he asserts, "This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage" (270). He asserts that he is "up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administrative office" (270). (You may go back to Module 1, EEG 8 and reinforce your knowledge related to the introduction of English education in India). It is for this reason that he ultimately resigns. Mr. Brown, with "his western mind, classifying, labelling, departmentalizing" fails to grasp the significance of Krishna's decision.

The character of the headmaster is juxtaposed with that of Mr. Brown in order to bring out the differences in their visions and philosophy. The latter, for example, promotes 'modernity' in education which includes agenda like promotion of games and sports as part of the overall education system. Krishna mentions how Brown supports the teams that participate in a tournament and hints at the injustice on his part when he mentions that Brown "gives no end of liberties to the tournament players and even sends them on tours" (203). He further observes, "They are even made to pass examinations! And this sort of thing is supposed to make our people modern and vigorous…." (203). This obviously involves a lot of spending for which the institutions look forward to the Government grants and other forms of support like building infrastructure of the institutions. This, according to the headmaster, amounts to "sell[ing] your soul to the Government for support" (202). He believes that schools and colleges are not gymnasia. "The main business of an educational institution," he observes, "is to shape the mind and character" (203).

Games and sports have their own values which he does not deny. What he criticises is blind copying of the Western model: "It is all a curse, copying, copying, copying. We could as well have been born monkeys to justify our powers of imitation" (203). That is why he interweaves the values of sports and pleasure into his own system of education. He invents stories and illustrates them and makes the students participate in the evolution of the stories. In the process the students derive pleasure and at the same time learn. There is no coercion in the process. Teaching remains a paid 'work' unless some vision or mission is infused into it.

3.11.5.4 Representation of the Spiritual World

Right from the beginning Krishna has not been a materialist in outlook. He does not like the job of teaching in a college in a mechanical, and a bit coercive, environment. But he continues doing his job only for earning a livelihood. But once his wife dies, he gets frustrated with the life itself. This is the moment when he begins to move away from the mundane world to one of spirituality. Accidentally he comes in contact with a 'medium' through whom his wife had sent him a message of communion. A group of spirits, including that of his wife Shusila, have been trying to bridge the gulf between life and after-life. Krishna responds to the call and establishes meaningful contact with his wife's spirit. It offers him hope and peace. During their interactions a picture of the lives of the other world emerges.

The spirit of Shusila informs Krishna that 'time' in the worldly sense does not exist in their world. Their life is 'one of thought and experiences' and also of 'aspiration, striving and joy' (193). Thought, she informs him, 'has solidity and power' (193). The spirits have ample leisure and they revel in 'Divine Light' (193). Since they do not have physical bodies, they are not in need of any exercise. "Music is ever with us here, and it transports us to higher planes" (193). They are able to contact their dear ones living on earth if the latter are receptive and responsive. Underlining the main difference between the human state and their own state of existence, the spirit of Shusila observes, "Between thought and fulfilment there is no interval. Thought is fulfilment, motion and everything" (195). No obstruction exists between their thoughts/longing and fulfilment. She says, "Music directly transports us" (195). Whatever they think of — perfume, dress, or whatever else — they possess immediately. Krishna sometimes wonders how Shusila can wear a saree which remains boxed in a trunk in the house. He finds the answer, almost Platonic in nature, in her explanation, "What you have seen is its counterpart, the real part of the thing is that which is in thought, and it can never be lost or destroyed or put away" (195). The responses of their world are "immediate and fine" and human minds can only strive

for it. What is striving in the human world is already "an achievement" in the other world.

Shusila can see Krishna but Krishna cannot see Shusila. This realisation pains Krishna. She, however, assures him that with training he will be able to see her 'form' and hear her bangles clanging and 'feast' his eyes on her 'dress and form' (196). She maintains that she is the same person on earth but without the earthly 'ailments, ills and cares' (196). (It can be noted that at the end of the novel Krishna is able to see Shusila. How would you interpret this?)

The differences between the two worlds are thus clearly brought out by the spirit of Shusila.

3.11.5.5 Malgudi in *The English Teacher*

In the novel *The English Teacher* R. K. Narayan presents Malgudi as a growing town. Development of real estate properties takes place at the outskirts of the town. It is a place surrounded by villages. The village Tayur, where the stranger who acts as a medium during the seance sessions lives, is a place full of greenery. Krishna calls it a 'haven.' Villagers from surrounding rural areas commute to the town for various reasons. On his way to Tayur, Krishna comes across a medley of sights and sounds. Rushing across various points of the town like Ellamman Street, Nallappa's Grove and the cremation ground at the end of the town, Krishna encounters "[j]ingling bullock carts, talkative villagers returning home from the town, and a miscellaneous crowd on the dusty path..." (159). All these make the place lively. The town is given a topography with names of streets, roads, lanes, neighbourhoods and its restaurants and markets. He mentions South Extension, Fort Area, Racecourse Road, and Vinayak Mudali Street, Sarayu Street, Ellamman Street. Krishna and his wife visit restaurant called Bombay Ananda Bhavan. They also visit a temple and buys toys from shops in the market. Malgudi is a town with the river Sarayu dividing it. Krishna takes a dip into the river in the wee hours, feels re-vitalised and wonders at the bounties of nature. He feels like writing a poem. The river links him up with his early days at the village by the side of which the same river flows.

Malgudi has people with oddities and eccentricities. The landlord who ultimately rents him his house is one such character. While discussing the rent, he unnecessarily tells Krishna, "Don't pretend you own a car" (33), but as soon as he learns that Krishna is a college teacher, he is all reverence for him and readily agrees to lend his house. Both his aggression and reverence are in excess. Some of his colleagues too have some oddities and eccentricities and have even some amount of hypocrisy. All such characters, painted

with humour and irony, lend the place a sense of reality. (You may take some characters to develop the point).

Krishna castigates the elected members of the Malgudi Municipality. They are good for nothing people. They do not discharge their duties properly. They are perpetually engaged in mutual bickering and in mud-slinging exercises. They become alert only when a distinguished visitor comes to the town. The visitor is usually led to the stairs of a tower from which s/he is shown the distant Sarayu "cutting across the northern boundary of the town," thus offering him a scope to experience the panoramic view of the place (213). Otherwise, they are utterly negligent of their duties. Anderson Lane where the headmaster lives is a completely neglected area. Narayan describes it with his usual humour and irony. Krishna comes to know this area while visiting Headmaster's house. It is dusty, dirty and unhygienic. Krishna blames the Malgudi Municipality for its notoriety.

Malgudi in the novel has specific South Indian features, particularly the names of the characters and places indicate its South Indianness. Characters from this place also settle in some other South Indian cities (e.g. Krishna's elder brother settles in Hyderabad) or visit them occasionally (Krishna's medium visits Trichinopoly). Critics often point out that the broad characteristic features of Malgudi and its inhabitants can be applied to any other Indian town or city. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for example, observes, "For decades Malgudi has been perceived as a quintessential Indian town, ordinary and uneventful" (170) and has a "metonymic relationship with India as a whole" (174). It is presented as a pan-Indian city. Narayan, she observes, emphasises its Indianness "by which is meant a good humoured inertia and a casual tolerance which any reader in the country is expected to recognise as familiar" (170-71). It does not specify, she complains, its latitude and longitude, neither does it display characters of multiple identities and backgrounds. This kind of pan-Indian characteristics are not usually found in the novels of *bhasha* literatures. Therefore she comes to the conclusion that "Malgudi is Hindu upper caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal, immutable" (171). She is of the opinion that Narayan is obviously burdened by what she calls 'an anxiety of Indianness.' (The above criticism is taken from Meenakhi Mukherjee's essay "Anxiety of Indianness" which is in your syllabus. Now that you have finished reading *The English Teacher,* you should read Mukherjee's text to examine how far her criticism is valid).

(Read very useful discussion of Malgudi in Thieme's book, pp. 1-4, 15-22, 191-4 and in Ramanan's book, p. 8, pp. 13-4, 25-36. Both Thieme and Ramanan have discussed Malgudi as a heterotopic space. You will get details of the books in "Suggested Reading" section).

3.11.5.6 Humour and Irony

Humour and irony, often seamlessly intermeshed, constitute an important aspect of R. K. Narayan's style. He is a keen observer and portrays characters and describes events with an unmistakable sense of humour. Whenever he locates oddities and eccentricities, he treats them with a benign irony tempered by a sense of humour. When he criticises something, his use of irony may be incisive but it is never tinged by malice. We find several such cases in *The English Teacher*.

British Indian education system, of which Krishna himself and his colleagues are an indispensable part, is the main butt of his satire. But this satire is mellowed by the humorous descriptions of situations in which the excesses and oddities come out. Krishna does not like the system but at the moment he is powerless to opt out of it. He is trapped in it. He feels like a cow (he has some reservation about using the metaphor) doing his daily chores. Fully aware of the irony of the situation, he bears it, not mutely but with a sense of humour which perhaps is the best possible way of tolerating it. His description of the Principal of his college is one such example. The first time we come across Mr. Brown, he is seen lecturing his teachers on the incompetence of an English Honours student who does not know that the word 'Honours' needs to be spelled with a 'u.' The absurdity of the situation is quite evident as the mistake is quite common among students and the irony is that Mr. Brown, in spite of spending thirty years in India and in the educational sector, does not know this. He also seems to be oblivious to the fact that English is not an indigenous language in India. Mr. Brown himself, despite his long stay, fails to pick up a single Indian language. Narayan subtly satirises the arrogance of this representative of colonialism. What is more ironic is that Gajapathy, an Indian colleague of Krishna, looks 'heavily concerned' and appears to be 'swelling with importance' at his support of Mr. Brown's contention while indeed he should be more familiar with the reality. His colonial mentality is evident here. The ironic situation is, however, presented mostly with humorous descriptions. Here is an example: "Our Assistant Professor, Gajapathy, scowled at us, as if it were us who had induced the boy to drop the 'u'. Brown cleared his throat as a signal for further speech, and we watched his lips" (3). There is a subtle dig at the use of Gajapathy's designation which suggests the existence of a hierarchy among the employed teachers, many of whom are junior lecturers. Any disagreement with him, as Krishna ruminates, might lead to "an hour of extra work every day, or [he may] compel me to teach the history of language, of which I knew nothing" (3). This is quite ironical too that a junior lecturer does not know his subject well although he is employed for the purpose. The way, however, he describes the entire episode makes the reader enjoy the

situation. He also appreciates the author's concern that the misfits occupy positions in the system which they should not have been allowed to do.

[There are many such situations where humour conceals the irony and satire which lie underneath but operate powerfully to foreground the hypocrisy, dishonesty and eccentricity of characters and oddities of situations. Dear students, you will do well to choose some other situations as well, e.g. Krishna's encounter with his landlord (Chapter One, pp. 32-4) and include your analysis of these episodes in your answer].

3.11.6 Summing Up

You must have realised by now that Narayan's *The English Teacher* is a very rich text which offers us a picture of the time. It is placed against the placid socio-cultural background of Malgudi where no earth-shaking social or political event takes place to disturb the overall social fabric of the community. Yet subtle changes in the family structure are evident as aspiring job-seekers leave their ancestral places and their joint families to go to cities, settle down there and gradually form their own nuclear families. Disenchantment with an education system that does not pay adequate attention to the development of the mind also grows in a situation charged with nationalist feelings. The novel is basically a narrative of the progress of the protagonist's inner consciousness, but before attaining it he goes through the usual process of attaining education, getting into a profession and forming a family. Narayan employs a first person narrative in which the protagonist (the narrator) views his world with a sense of sharp irony intermeshed with genial humour. I hope, you have, in the meantime, gone through the novel and enjoyed it thoroughly.

3.11.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Show how the Indian family system is represented in *The English Teacher*.
2. Write critically on Narayan's criticism of the mainstream education system in British India.
3. Critically analyse the character of Krishna. Show whether his character develops during the scope of the novel.
4. Critically analyse the character of the headmaster. Does his vision offer a model for Krishna to follow? Does his school offer an alternative model to that of the mainstream education? (Read pp. 60-66 from Thieme's book and critically use the points he discusses)

5. Comment critically on the ending of the novel. (Read p. 21, pp. 54-5 and pp. 65-6 from Thieme's book and critically use the points he discusses)

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. How is Malgudi represented in the novel? Do you agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee when she calls Malgudi 'pan-Indian'?
2. Will you consider *The English Teacher* as an autobiographical novel? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Draw a short pen-picture of Krishna's hostel life. How do you see his transition from a hostel boarder to a responsible head of a small family?
4. Describe Krishna's anxiety while waiting at the station to receive his wife and their baby. What impression do you form about his character from this episode? In which chapter does it occur?
5. Why are house-keeping and house-keeping skill given so much prominence in the novel? In this context analyse the role of the women characters in the novel.
6. Analyse the episode involving the old clock and comment on the husband-wife relationship on the basis of your reading of this episode.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Describe Krishna's early life in his village.
2. Read the novel and try to find out the texts the students of the English Department of Albert Mission College had to study. Also note down the names of the authors Krishna's father read during his B.A. course and Krishna's comment on his father's use of the English language.
3. What evidence of Krishna being a poet do you find in the text?
4. Write a short note on Krishna's experience of the house-hunting expedition.
5. How does Shusila contact typhoid? What measures were prescribed for remission of her fever?
6. What description of the 'other world' do you get from Shusila's communications to Krishna?
7. Do you notice any anti-colonialist and pro-nationalist stance in Krishna's assertions and activities?
8. Why has Jasmine flower or its odour been invoked repeatedly in the novel?

3.11.8 Suggested Readings

Greene, Graham. Introduction. *Bachelor of Arts*.http://www.e-reading.club/bookreader.php/1022392/Narayan_-_Bachelor_of_Arts.html.

Mishra, Pankaj. "R. K. Narayan." *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 193-208.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "The Anxiety of Indianness." *The Perishable Empire*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002. 166-186.

Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 1982.

Narayan, R.K. *The English Teacher*. 1946. Madras: Indian Thought Publications, 1955.

Ramanan, Mohan G. *R. K. Narayan : An Introduction*, Bengaluru: Foundation Books, 2013.

Rao, Ranga. *R. K. Narayan*. Makers of Indian Literature Series. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2004.

Thieme, John. *R. K. Narayan*. Contemporary World Writers Series. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010.

Unit -12 ❐ Anita Desai: *Fire on the Mountain*

Structure

3.12.1 Objectives

This unit will analyse Anita Desai's novel, *Fire on the Mountain*. Focussing on the thematic and structural significance of this novel, this unit will familiarise you with the characters that populate this novel and will help you explore the distinctive traits of the novelist's work. You will also learn to critically evaluate a feminist text and become familiar with her representational techniques.

3.12.2 Introduction

Anita Desai (1937-) is one of the most important Indian women novelists. Along with Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Shanta Ramarao et al., she has carved a niche for herself in Indian English Literature. She has appeared on the literary scene in the 1970s. The forte of her writing is exploration of the inner-psyche of her characters. Searching for truth is her concern that finds expression in her writing. This is quite evident from her interview with Yashodhara Dalmia when she figuratively says:

> One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search for meaning, for value. For – dare I say it – truth. I think of the world as an iceberg – the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. Writing is an effort to discover and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things. (Qtd. in Kundu 58)

Her characters are usually from the urban middle class. While exploring them, she seems to have attached less importance to the socio-political and socio-economic conditions. Even though such conditions are used, they are, in the words of Jasbir Jain, 'subtly camouflaged and subdued by dwelling on emotions and responses which are far more engrossing than the hard facts of reality' (qtd. in Bande 12). Robin Jared Lewis comments on how Desai has been distinctive in her writing: "Desai not only brought new characters to the forefront, but she also fixed her penetrating eye on the inner lives of the expanding urban middle class, delving deeply into the realms of imagination and fantasy through a variety of techniques relatively new to Indian writing'' (149). N R Gopal says, "Her novels focus on the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists at some critical juncture of their lives'' (qtd. in Kundu 10). In the process, she brings out the individuality of her characters. She writes mainly about women and with a grave concern she portrays their abject condition. According to Paul Brians, "Passionate identification with women's plights and sensitive description of their surroundings" strikingly characterise Desai's fiction (96).

3.12.3 Anita Desai: Life and Works

Anita Desai was born in 1937 in Mussoori, India. Her father was D. N. Mazumdar who was of Bengali origin and her mother was Toni Nime who was of German origin. She received her education at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi and later at Miranda House, Delhi University. In 1958, she married a businessman Asvin Desai. Notably, Kiran Desai, the Booker Prize winning novelist, is one of their four children. She remained in India for long before coming to live and work in England since the late 1980s. It is important to mention that 'she became famous in her homeland before she was known or published abroad" (Brians 87). However, in 1993 she joined the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a creative writing teacher. At present she has been enjoying both teaching and creative writing in the United States.

At the age of seven, Anita Desai began to write in English. She published her first story at the age of nine. Later, she chose to write novels. She has written some short stories as well as stories for children. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* drew some attention when it was published in 1963. Other important novels written by her include:

Voices in the City (1965)
Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1971)
Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)
Fire on the Mountain (1977)

Clear Light of Day (1980)
Village by the Sea (1982)

Notably enough, her novel *In Custody* (1984) was made into a film (1993) with a screenplay by Shahrukh Husain. The film, starring Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri, was directed by Ismail Merchant. Her works have earned her a great recognition. She has received the National Academy of Letters Award in 1978 for the novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). For this novel, she has been awarded the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize in 1978. She has received the British Guardian Award for Children's Fiction for her fiction *Village by the Sea*.

➢ **Activities**:

1. Given the family background of Anita Desai, how would you configure her 'Indianness' and her position in Indian Writing in English?
2. Some of Desai's important novels have been mentioned in this section. Write down the titles of her other novels.
3. The merit of a novelist is often measured by the awards he/she wins. Mention some awards and honours won by Anita Desai.
4. Name some of Desai's contemporary novelists.

3.12.4 Section-wise Summary of *Fire on the Mountain*

Let us sum up the story of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*. It has three sections. The first section deals with the life of Nanda Kaul whereas the second section presents the life of Raka. The third section discusses the life of Ila Das. Through these sections, the author seeks to present the commonality that all the three individuals – Nanda, Ila, and Raka- become victims at the hands of patriarchy in their respective life.

In the first section titled 'Nanda Kaul at Carignano', we see Nanda Kaul, the widow of a former Vice-Chancellor as the protagonist. In her old age, she has come to Carignano, a hill station bungalow in Kasauli. There she lives like a recluse. The place is in agreement with her mood and temperament. She likes to be detached from her kin, her friends, and her acquaintances. She is now afraid of letters or telephonic calls that are likely to drag her into the familial duties and responsibilities that will hamper the smooth flow of her solitary life. In fact, she finds justification for coming to Carignano as she already performed her duties at multiple levels and led a very busy life. As a mother of several children, she took much pains to bring them up. As a housewife, she took care of the household affairs. As a hostess, she attended to a large number of guests who often paid visits to her Vice-

Chancellor husband in their bungalow. Naturally, she is now very much tired of so many duties and responsibilities. In course of time, her children settled down in their own lives. Her husband also died. She now decides to come to Carignano towards the end of her life and begins a new life of her own. Here she enjoys the peace and solitude that she craved for all her life.

She does not want to engage with duties and responsibilities anymore. But one day a letter from her daughter Asha disrupts the serenity of her present life. Asha, the letter informs her, will send Raka, the daughter of Tara to Carignano. The child will be staying with her great grandmother. Taking it for granted that the company of Raka will relieve her mother of her loneliness, Asha sends Raka who is on her way to Carignano. Asha explains to her mother the unavoidable circumstances under which she is compelled to send Raka to her. Tara's married life is about to break down. Tara would go with her husband to Geneva where he is recently posted so that she can improve her relation with him. Raka's presence there might prove to be a stumbling block in this context. Another practical reason for not taking her is that Raka has not fully recovered from typhoid. Asha herself cannot keep her at home because she is going to Bombay. She could have taken Raka to Bombay, but the little Raka who has been very weak after her illness, will not be able to endure the heat and humidity of the place. Coming to know all this, Nanda understands the problems. So, she cannot but accept the child Raka. Now Nanda develops certain apprehensions about the impending duties and responsibilities. She thinks that she will have to feed the child, look for playmates for her, and send her to bed – duties she performed in the past but is now loath to carry out again. Moreover, Raka's presence will disturb her peace and deprive her of the privacy she has been enjoying for some time.

The second section of the novel titled 'Raka comes to Carignano' deals with the life of Raka. She comes to Carignano. Gradually, she begins to develop an attachment to the place. Quite independently she rambles here and there in the forest. In a way she becomes a child of nature. Nanda Kaul had an apprehension that the child would put her into difficulties by making various demands. But this apprehension is disproved by Raka. Her behaviour and attitude suggest that she has nothing to do with her great grandmother. Nanda Kaul realises that Raka is unlike other children. She gradually develops an attachment to the girl. Though initially Nanda was unwilling to receive Raka, she is now unwilling to let her go away. She wants to enjoy the company of the little girl. In order to keep her very close to her, she starts telling her stories. In fact, she fabricates stories about her childhood, her father, and her married life in her husband's house. But the child does not find much interest in the stories. So, Nanda's efforts find little or no success.

The third section titled 'Ila Das leaves Carignano' tells us about the life of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's friend since her childhood. She is now posted as a social welfare officer in Kasauli. Coming to know that Nanda has come to Carignano in Kasauli, Ila expresses her desire to meet her. One day she pays a visit to the house of Nanda Kaul. They meet each other after a long time. If we analyse Ila's life closely, we will see how the vicissitudes of fortune have affected her life. Her father was financially well-off. He had sent his three sons abroad for higher education, but they were so prodigal that they squandered all the money their father had sent. They also borrowed a lot of money from others. Unfortunately enough, their father ultimately found himself destitute because of his sons. The life became miserable for Ila Das and her sister Rima. They suffered a lot and found it difficult to make both ends meet. Under such circumstances, her friend Nanda Kaul came forward and requested her Vice-Chancellor husband to create a job for her friend. Accordingly, Ila got the job of a lecturer in the Home Science College. But after some time she lost that job because the new Vice Chancellor had gone against her appointment. Once again she found herself in misery. Then Nanda advised her to do a course in social service. Accordingly, Ila did the course and then got the job of a social welfare officer and got her posting in the area down the hills. People there were illiterate, orthodox and superstitious. So Ila found it difficult to eliminate various kinds of social maladies. She tried to dissuade people from the practice of child marriage that was rampant in that area. While doing all this, she faced a strong opposition from the males. What made her job more difficult was the presence of a local priest who instigated people against her. Despite this opposition she was a bit successful in preventing a child marriage. But in doing so, she invited the wrath of one Preet Singh who was about to marry off his seven-year-old daughter to an old man. Eventually she was raped and murdered by the man. When Nanda Kaul received the shocking news, she found it hard to believe it. She lost all her faith in everything and the world appeared to be a big lie to her. However, ultimately she died of shock.

➢ **Activities**:

1. Take a look at the novel and prepare a list of the members of the family and figure out their relationship. Draw a family-tree of Nanda Kaul.
2. To which soial class do the members of Nanda Kaul's family belong? Prepare a list of the features of the class as evident in the novel.
3. Read the novel carefully and identify some incidents that show Raka's deep attachment to nature.
4. From which incident does the novel derive its title?

5. Prepare a list of the social ills Ila Das had to address.
6. Write a note on the family as a social unit.

3.12.5 Characters of *Fire on the Mountain*

- ✓ **Nanda Kaul:** Nanda Kaul is an old woman living in Kasauli after the death of her Vice-Chancellor husband and after her children became independent. She had discharged her duties properly as a mother and also as a housewife. Now towards the end of her life, she seeks to enjoy privacy in the solitude of a place like Kasauli. This is why she has come to this place and lives the life of a recluse. She wants to stay away from the members of her family. She is extremely unwilling to communicate with anyone associated with her past. But eventually she has to take the responsibility of her great granddaughter Raka who is thrust upon her by her daughter Asha.
- ✓ **Raka:** Raka is the daughter of Tara who is the granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. This little girl is the child of a broken home arising out of the marital discord of her parents. She has recently suffered from typhoid. She is sent to Nanda's house in the hill station that is likely to be conducive to the speedy recovery of her health. Her mother also does not want Raka to accompany her in her trip to Geneva to improve her strained relation with her husband. This is yet another reason why Raka is left to the care of her great grandmother. She is seen taking a strange interest in the scene of devastation like a ruined house or a burnt-tree. She has been unlike other normal children. This is all because the shaky conjugal life of her parents has ill-effects on her mind.
- ✓ **Ila Das**: Ila Das is the friend of Nanda Kaul. Though born and brought up in an affluent family, she finds her life characterised by the vicissitudes of fortune in many ways. However, towards the end of her life, she becomes a social welfare officer and gets her posting in the area of Kasauli. Whole-heartedly, she attempts at eradicating social maladies like child marriage. She is successful in thwarting a child marriage. But in the process, she enrages the father of the child. Tragically enough, she finds herself raped and killed by this man.
- ✓ **Ram Lal:** Ram Lal is the servant-cum-cook of Nanda Kaul in her Carignano house. After the little child Raka comes to Carignano, it is Ram Lal who takes greater responsibility than Nanda to take care of the child. Very soon he develops a good rapport with her. Ram Lal becomes a confidant to her. When he comes to know of Raka's secret and disappearance from the house, he warns her of the

possible dangers lurking in the places she frequents. In a way, he becomes a guide to Raka. Besides, he often tells her stories, often in an exaggerated way, to amuse her.

3.12.6 Critical Understanding of the Text

- **Title of the novel**

The title of Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* is suggestive and evocative in many ways. However, it is significant to know that "Fire on the Mountain" is the title of the second chapter of William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. Desai seems to have derived this phrase as the title of her novel. In Golding's novel, we see that some British school boys who were the only survivors of a plane crash, were left stranded on a coral island on the Pacific. As there were no adults with them, the boys initially enjoyed unlimited freedom. After some time, they felt the urge for being rescued from that island. They lit a fire on the mountain-top of the island. By doing this, they tried to draw the attention of some passing ships. So here for these hapless schoolboys, the fire on the mountain is the signifier of hope and possibilities. However, the fire they produced on the mountain top became so huge that it went beyond their control. Consequently, the flora and fauna of the island were burnt down to a great extent. Anita Desai seems to have been attracted by the title and context of this chapter of *Lord of the Flies*.

In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, the frequent occurrences of forest fires on the mountain are very significant. Ram Lal, the servant, informs the inquisitive little girl Raka about them. He has witnessed some of the forest fires coming very close to the railing of Carignano, destroying many trees and houses. Nanda Kaul also tells her about the forest fires. She informs her that the forest fires break out in the Simla hills every summer particularly in June and often engulf some houses. Nanda adds that it is not easy to combat the fire because of the inadequacy of water. This is, of course, a natural fire. Raka expresses her desire to see a forest fire. One day she gets the chance to see a forest fire and gets excited about it, but at the same time, she is pained to hear the cries of the birds and animals burning in this fire. The incidences of forest fires obviously have something to do with the story of the novel at the surface level. Hence we can find some justification of the title of the novel. But we need to see beneath the surface so that we can fully bring out the appropriateness of the title. So far we have come to know about the forest fires that are natural. Towards the end of the novel, we hear of a forest fire, this fire being man-made. It is Raka who sets the forest on fire. This fire is literal but it assumes greater significance at the figurative level. The meanings it unfolds not only

make some contribution to the title but also enrich the novel as a whole. This fire is a protest against the male dominated society that has done a grave injustice to Ila Das. Ila's life is marked by vicissitudes of fortune. Towards the end of her life, we see her as a social welfare officer making efforts to eradicate various forms of superstitions and social maladies that affect the people of the hills. This commendable engagement does not earn her any reward. Shockingly enough, she becomes a victim of rape and murder by one Preet Singh who planned to marry off his minor daughter to an old widower. This is why we find the little Raka giving vent to her anger against the cruel male dominated world. She says, 'Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani—look—the forest is on fire' (159). This fire that Raka has caused seems to be an externalisation of the fire in her heart. This act of setting fire to the forest can also be seen as a protest against her father in some way. She has witnessed her father treating her mother with violence and abuse. She realises that her father's brutal treatment makes her mother suffer from nervous disorder. This has produced a traumatic effect on her. A feeling of insecurity has always gripped her mind. Even the healthy growth of her mind has been stunted. She has failed to develop any feeling of attachment to her parents. Because of the hostile domestic environment, she has also failed to develop a sense of belonging to that home. It is evident in the authorial description of Raka's feelings: "I'm shipwrecked, Raka exulted, I'm shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock—my boat, alone in my boat on the sea… ''(68). Through this act of setting the forest on fire, she seems to protest against those who entertain patriarchal values and ideologies. Asha does not hold her son-in-law responsible for the marital discord despite his glaring faults. Rather she accuses her daughter of not adjusting to her husband. In this way she indirectly contributes to the perpetuation of the patriarchal family structure. Raka's anger against the patriarchal society seems to have accumulated since then.

By setting fire to the mountain, Raka expresses the spirit of reformation. For her the entire world has become an evil world. The fire would seemingly purge the society of the evil effects of patriarchy. It could also be said that Raka's protest is an attempt towards making this world free of various forms of injustice being done to women by the patriarchal society. Anita Desai seems to have instilled a rebellious spirit in Raka. Even the fact that an introvert child like Raka is protesting very significantly accentuates the need of the hour. So, the title *Fire on the Mountain* is justified.

➢ **Activities**

1. What intertextual element do you find in the title of the novel?

2. Trace the correspondences and differences between the two titles in the two novels.
3. Why is Raka angry against the world?
4. What differences do you find between Raka's setting fire and natural fires?

• A Feminist Reading of *Fire on the Mountain*

As a political movement, feminism advocates the equality of women with men in terms of rights. It critically examines how men employ various mechanisms to perpetuate their dominance over women. Largely a western phenomenon, this movement becomes dominant in the 1960s and 1970s. The spirit of feminism is also seen in the works of literature to a great extent. Anita Desai, one of the important Indian women novelists becomes greatly influenced by feminism. In her *Fire on the Mountain*, she has sensitively portrayed the predicament of some women characters in the Indian context. She has made an attempt to reveal the overt and covert ideologies that continue to oppress women like Nanda, Tara, Ila, even the little child Raka, and the minor daughter of one Preet Singh. She has also challenged the stereotypical attitudes of men to women.

Nanda Kaul who is the protagonist in the novel, becomes a victim of patriarchy in her conjugal life. Her Vice Chancellor husband seems to be guided by the ideology that a woman should be a housekeeper. This patriarchal ideology has gradually affected her. She has internalised her role as a housekeeper. She believes that she is destined to play this role. We see that she performs with great care and attention all the household duties. She remains awfully engaged in the everyday drudgery. This is why she finds a lack of privacy for herself. Despite running the household efficiently, she finds herself alienated from this house because of the presence of the patriarchal environment in the family. The house for which she does all she can, never belongs to her: "Mentally she walked through the rooms of that house—his house, never hers'' (20). Evidently, Nanda's husband considers her subordinate to him, giving no importance to her state of mind. However, apart from the role of a housekeeper, Nanda plays the role of a mother. She is the mother of several children. She is not happy with this because her husband has reduced her to a procreating machine. Her husband takes her for granted and therefore does not feel the need to know what she actually wants. In fact, she is left with no agency. The patriarchal attitude on the part of her husband has prevented him from thinking that the conjugal life should be based on mutual understanding. She is also fed up with the act of bringing up children. She really cannot enjoy her motherhood, the motherhood which is conventionally lauded. She really does not find any joy in childbearing and childrearing. Actually, she seeks to get respite from role playing that is imposed on women as part of patriarchal programming. The role playing actually perpetuates male-chauvinism. So, Nanda has

developed complete aversion to the act of role playing, and this has prompted her to come to Carignano. Rightly does Robin Jared Lewis say that "the central characters seek to escape the powerful complex of social, religious, and familial obligations that hinders their search for individuality" (150-1).

As a wife Nanda Kaul does not find any sort of mental peace because of her husband's infidelity. We know that this kind of infidelity brings the greatest dishonour to the self of a married woman. Naturally, Nanda finds herself not only neglected but also psychologically devastated. She does not really enjoy any great social dignity in being a Vice-Chancellor's wife. Instead, she considers it meaningless as the sacrosanct bond of marriage is defiled by her husband. Because of the domineering patriarchal influence of her husband, she cannot protest against this great marital injustice done to her. True, as a Vice-Chancellor's wife, she has always appeared with all the trappings of material life. True, her husband has presented her like a queen before his guests. His guests often flattered her thus: "Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen. Really Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does… ''(19). By presenting her like this, Prof. Kaul wants to see two purposes served. One, he wants to show that he is a loving husband. But this is nothing but a kind of hypocrisy on his part. Two, he has impressed upon his wife the fact that he has never deprived her of material happiness. May be that outwardly she is presented as a queen, but psychologically she is ruined. So she finds no meaning in her existence in her husband's house. This is why after the death of her husband, she comes to Carignano in Kasauli to live in complete isolation. The omniscient author tells us that " … [S]he paced the house, proprietarily , feeling the feel of each stone in the paving with bare feet'' (33). Gradually she develops a sense of belonging to the Carignano house, her hill station resort. This kind of sense of belonging she could not or was not allowed to develop to her husband's house. In other words, she creates a space for herself. As Lewis observes: "Her flight into the mountains is a defiantly feminist gesture that parodies the spiritual retreat into the Himalayas from the worldly obligations that an aging male householder undertakes in accordance with the traditional Hindu life cycle''(151).

If we consider the married life of Tara, Nanda Kaul's granddaughter, we see that her husband tortures her both mentally and physically. In an inebriated state, he not only abuses her but also beats her. He takes it for granted that he has the right to treat his wife violently because of his gender. As a result, Tara finds the married life unbearable. She does not know the fate of her married life even though her mother eagerly wants her to do something to resuscitate it. We see that Tara's mother persuades her to make some adjustment to her husband at the cost of her honour because of the internalisation of

patriarchal norms. In spite of being aware of the fact that her daughter receives a cruel treatment at the hands of her husband, she defends her son-in-law by citing her daughter's incompatibility with him. As she writes in a letter to Nanda: "[H]e's not really so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand him, doesn't understand *men* , and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him so I can't blame him *entirely* although it is true that he does drink…''(16). This statement of her mother shows a kind of subjugation to patriarchy. She does not have the courage to raise a voice of protest. She even cannot encourage her daughter to do so against the brutal treatment at the hands of her husband. In a very indirect manner she advises her daughter to accept the ill-treatment. She suggests that the subservience of her daughter to her husband will help her save the marriage. She seems to have absorbed patriarchal ideologies.

Tara's little child Raka also becomes, though indirectly, a victim in the patriarchal family structure. Several times she has witnessed her father "beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse— harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept" (78). This horrible experience of her early years had traumatised her. As a result, the normal growth of her mind has been stunted. She has been unlike other children. Her mother has been a patient of neurosis. As Raka finds herself deprived of parental love, affection, care, and company, she fails to develop any sort of attachment to her parents. This is why she likes to remain detached from her great grandmother while staying at Carignano. She is incapable of understanding the warmth and worth of relationships. Unlike other children of her age, she even cannot find any joy in a social setting like a club. Her mental-make up is so adversely affected that she cannot enjoy the beautiful sights and sounds of nature. Rather she gets interested in the bizarre objects of nature.

If we take into account the life of Ila Das and her sister Rima, we will see that they too have become victims of a grave injustice which is deliberately done by their father. They suffer a lot due to the biased outlook of their father. He divides the family property among his three sons. He gives nothing to his two daughters taking it for granted that they do not deserve any share of it. He seems to be guided by the belief that the prerogative of enjoying the property goes to the male children only. The kind of treatment their father metes out to them is nothing but a reflection of his patriarchal mindset. Moreover, this father displays a gender bias by giving his sons higher education abroad in the reputed universities like Cambridge, Harvard, and Heidelberg. But he educates his two

daughters in India. So far as his sons are concerned, they are not attentive to their studies and hence they skip lectures. They are so prodigal that they begin to squander all the money sent by their father on drinking and racecourses. They even begin to borrow money from others. In the process, they gradually run into heavy debts. It is their father who has to pay off all the debts by selling everything — his own horses, his own carriage, his house, his land. Ultimately, the three sons leave their father destitute. They are so unscrupulous that they do not come home to attend the funeral of their father. So we see that because of their father's gendered treatment and the patriarchal mind-set, Ila and Rima find themselves in great financial hardship. Eking out a living becomes a great challenge for them.

After so many ups and downs of her life, Ila ultimately becomes a social welfare officer. We find her committed to her job and trying hard to combat the social maladies like child marriage. She is trying to explain to the local people the harmful effects of child marriage. She finds some success in thwarting the marriage of one girl child whose father, one Preet Singh, is about to marry off her to a widower with six children from his previous marriage. We see how the girl child becomes a victim of great injustice at the hands of her father. Her father is not at all concerned about the well-being of her minor daughter. He takes it for granted that even a girl child can be used in the way he likes, thereby revealing his patriarchal mindset. In preventing this child marriage Ila has invited the wrath of Preet Singh. She seems to have hurt his masculine ego as a result of which he brutally rapes and kills her. In the process, he inflicts the greatest humiliation a woman can suffer. He considers the failure of the said marriage as a defeat at the hands of a female. True, Ila Das is a government social welfare officer, but in the eyes of Preet Singh she is just a woman. He considers women as mere objects. From a girl child to an elderly woman, he seeks to subjugate them. Through this act of rape and murder Preet Singh seems to consolidate and perpetuate the male domination in society. The perpetration of the violence of this kind against women in general and Ila Das in particular leaves Nanda Kaul terribly shocked. She ultimately dies of shock.

All this suggests the tragic life of women in society. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* we see that women in the Indian context, irrespective of their class and social background suffer because of the patriarchal forces that are overtly or covertly operative. Anita Desai has also exposed and interrogated the patriarchal ideologies. Thus, we see Desai expressing a true feminist concern.

- **Narrative Technique**

A writer presents the theme of his/ her work by developing a story. When it comes to narrating the story of a novel, he/she uses various narrative techniques. Sometimes the success of a work depends on the techniques employed in it. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* we find the predicament of women as a theme, among many others. Anita Desai has employed some narrative techniques to present this theme. The central figure Nanda Kaul seeks a kind of relief and release from the claustrophobic environment of the big house of her Vice Chancellor husband. She wants to spend the remaining days of her life amidst the sights and sounds of nature that is far from the madding crowd. In order to express this desire of Nanda Kaul, Desai has made use of poetry as an effective tool. In the process she has displayed some novelty in narrative techniques as well. Here Desai quotes Gerard Manly Hopkins's poem "Heaven Haven". This poem seems to be in consonance with the desire of Nanda Kaul.

> 'I have desired to go
> Where springs not fail
> To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
> And a few lilies blow.
>
> 'And I have asked to be
> Where no storms come,
> Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
> And out of the swing of the sea'. (63-64)

This poem of Hopkins, tells Nanda, is not about any particular place. It is actually about a nun's vocation. Nanda feels that this poem has something to do with her life.

More importantly, Desai has employed the omniscient narrative method to a great extent in *Fire on the Mountain*. As an omniscient author she narrates as well as interprets the life of Nanda Kaul spending the evening days of her life in a hill-station bungalow and enjoying her solitude. Let us have a look at one authorial narration: "It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life – as she realized on her first day at Carignano, with a great, cool flowering of relief – and at last she had it''(3). Not only the authorial narrations, we also find the use of some direct speeches in the mouths of the characters. These speeches serve to show the confidence, agency and relief that the character is gaining.

In Desai's novels action is less important. Exploring the inner climate of the characters is the most important trait in her novels. This is why we see the rare occurrences of events and incidents in her novels. As Paul Brians says, "She strives to convey moods and settings more than she does to tell stories: several of her novels contain very little external action, although many of them end abruptly in a catastrophe'' (87). However, against the backdrop of some social issues, she has tried to bring out the workings of the minds of her characters. As Iyenger says, "Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters'' (464). In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* too, Desai has made a psychic exploration of the characters, particularly of Nanda Kaul. She has used the technique of interior monologue to describe the thoughts of Nanda Kaul flowing through her mind. While making use of this technique, Desai intersperses the present and the past very beautifully. She narrates the fact that Nanda finds no space for herself because of her busy schedule. There she finds herself playing several roles – those of a wife, a mother, a housekeeper etc. She is not at all happy with any of these roles. As a wife she finds the sacrosanct bond of marriage defiled because of the extramarital relationship of her husband. This brings a great dishonour to her feminine entity, thereby tormenting her psyche. As a mother, she is tired of the act of bearing and rearing several children. She really does not find any joy in motherhood. As a housekeeper she takes care of everything. The act of housekeeping leaves her utterly disgusted because it denies her the much needed respite. Moreover, despite her praiseworthy efficiency in running the household and keeping it in good stead, she is never allowed to develop a sense of belonging to that house. All these painful thoughts are still alive in her memory. Through the technique of interior monologue, Desai reveals them quite effectively. Reflecting on her past life, Nanda now realizes how all those roles made her life utterly meaningless.

Desai, to a considerable extent, uses interior monologue while narrating the traumatic experience of the child Raka. She is haunted by the scenes of her father torturing her mother brutally. This technique of interior monologue effectively reveals Raka's subconscious mind and also explains why she fails to become like other normal children of her age.

The story of the novel brings out the truth, that attachment is the key to any meaningful human existence. True, Nanda Kaul celebrates her detachment from her relatives. Initially

she has tried to detach herself from the little child Raka. But gradually she tries to come very close to Raka and seeks to develop an affinity with her. She wants to have the company of Raka. She fabricates stories in order to attract the attention of the little girl. Here we find an old narrative method i.e. story within story that Desai has employed to a great extent. She weaves stories about her father. She tells Raka that her father was an explorer, a collector and an animal lover. She tells her about her father's house. The stories that she fabricates about her father project an idealised image of a father. This becomes a kind of wish-fulfilment. The fantasy world that she weaves offers her some kind of solace. This can also be seen as an attempt to build bridges between the Nanda and Raka despite the generation gap. It is true that Raka is very much charmed by the stories, but she is very much suspicious about the authenticity of the stories.

Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, takes part in the story-telling sessions in order to amuse the child. She tells her a story of the house of Nanda's Vice-Chancellor husband. But the child Raka loses interest in all these kinds of storytelling. She expresses a feeling of boredom. However, by engaging Nanda and Ila in the acts of fabricating stories, Desai has given them a larger space as narrators within the narrative of the novel. In the process, she has tried to make the old technique of story within a story effective here. Doing so, Desai remains detached as a narrator for a while.

Ram Lal, Nanda Kaul's servant-cum-cook, makes a significant contribution to the narration of the story. He seems to be a traditional oral narrator. He tries to entertain Raka with stories that are largely true but he often has imbued them with the colour of imagination. He tells her about the stories of ghosts, churails, mad dogs etc. In the act of story-telling, Ram Lal is much ahead of Nanda Kaul as he quite successfully arouses Raka's interest in and curiosity about the things he narrates whereas Nanda cannot do so.

The various narrative techniques Desai has employed cannot be seen only as the products of her formal exercises; rather they are highly effective in presenting the theme of the novel.

3.12.7 Summing Up

Anita Desai sympathetically portrays the lives of women in her fiction. In *Fire on the Mountain*, she has shown how Nanda, Ila, Tara, Raka, and Preet Singh's minor daughter have become victims of the patriarchal forces. Her forte as a writer – the exploration of the inner psyche of her characters, particularly the women characters – reveals itself in this novel. By presenting the plight of women in the Indian context and seeking to elicit

some sympathetic responses from the sensitive readers, Desai has expressed a deep feminist concern in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

3.12.8 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. '*Fire on the Mountain* is the story of women'. Discuss.
2. Is it possible to consider *Fire on the Mountain* as a feminist novel? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Critically examine the narrative techniques employed in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions

1. Critically examine the title of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.
2. Examine Desai's use of the 'mountain' as space.
3. Critically comment on the ending of the novel.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Why does Raka's arrival in Carignano make Nanda Kaul uncomfortable?
2. Who is Ila Das? How is she different from Nanda Kaul?
3. Briefly explain the symbolic significance of fire in the novel.

3.12.9 Suggested Readings

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Notes

Notes

Module- 4
Reading Indian English Drama

Unit - 13 ❐ Emergence and Development of Indian English Drama

Structure

4.13.1 Objectives

This unit presents an overview of the emergence and development of the genre of Indian English Drama. It will enable the learners to map the history of this genre, and in doing so, it will also help them to appreciate the literary contributions of the major Indian English playwrights.

4.13.2 Introduction

Mapping the tradition of Indian English Drama is a difficult task. This genre includes plays written originally in English and also those plays which have been translated from the vernacular languages into English. Since most of the Indian English playwrights have written plays both in English and the vernacular languages, and, as good translations of the plays written in vernacular are not always available, the idea of creating a canon of Indian English Drama is fraught with problems and risks. Despite the difficulty of mapping the tradition of this genre, the entire trajectory of Indian English Drama is rich in terms of innovation, experimentation and stagecraft. Though this genre could not flourish properly in the pre-independence era, the scenario in the post-independence period changed as Indian playwrights took the necessary initiative to stage plays that addressed the contemporary socio-political reality. In the post-colonial era, Indian English Drama evolved in a fascinating manner. Playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das, Mahesh Dattani and Poile Sengupta wrote plays based on a variety of issues that were appealing to the audience/readers. Indian English plays are now globally recognised, and this is the manifestation of the maturity of this genre.

4.13.3 Pre-independence Indian English Drama

The journey of Indian English Drama is quite uneven in the pre-independence phase. Unlike the other two genres discussed in earlier modules, Indian English Drama did not prosper during the colonial period. This was mainly because of the absence of any "firm dramatic tradition nourished on the actual performance in a live theatre" (Naik 98). Hence, the playwrights during the colonial period, as Naik observes, wrote "mostly closet drama" (98). The first Indian English drama was written by Krishna Mohan Banerjea in the year 1831. His English play, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrated of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* is a critical overview of the contemporary situation of the Hindu society in Calcutta. This play, as Banerji opines, shows the "inconsistencies and the blackness of the influential members of the Hindoo community" (qtd. in Naik 98). After Banerjea, the next playwright who contributed to the genre of Indian English Drama is Sri Aurobindo. Though Aurobindo is known for his spiritual and philosophical poetry, he has also written some plays. Aurobindo wrote verse plays and these plays clearly elucidate his "abiding fascination for Elizabethan drama" (Naik 99). The influence of the Western tradition is clearly visible in the plays of Aurobindo, as he not only drew inspiration from the Elizabethan playwrights, but also "modelled his plays exclusively on the late Victorian pastiches of Shakespearean drama" (Naik 100). Another playwright from Bengal who became famous for writing verse plays is Harindranath Chattopadhyay. His *Five Plays* (1937) "contains some of his characteristic work as a playwright revealing his social consciousness, flair for realism, and the bite in his prose writing" (Iyengar 412). Thus, the three playwrights from Bengal — Banerji, Aurobindo and Chattopadhyay — are the first three major playwrights who contributed to the genre of Indian English Drama during the colonial period. However, during the pre-independence period, apart from these playwrights, two important playwrights from South India also contributed to the genre. They are: A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar and Thyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam. Ayyar wrote many plays during the period 1926-1941. His plays have been published in two volumes, *Sita's Choice and Other Plays* (1935) and *The Slave of Idea and Other Plays* (1941). As a playwright, Ayyar is a 'reformist' and his plays are loaded with moral messages (Naik 147). His plays deal with the plight of women in India and they also represent the contemporary South Indian society. Kailasam wrote both in English and Kannada. Though he has written only a few English plays, they are good in terms of his innovative representations of the ancient mythical personages (Naik 148). In this context, mention must be made of *Karna or The Brahmin's Curse* (1946), which is considered to be a masterpiece of Kailasam. This play presents the story of Karna in a new dimension

as it attempts to build a narrative based on "Oedipus-fatality" (Iyengar 237). This play, as Naik opines, is "a Mahabharata in miniature," though Kailasam has used his innovative ideas to recast the original story of the epic in a new perspective (Naik 148). Thus, we can see that during the colonial period, playwrights mainly from Bengal and South India contributed to the field of Indian English Drama. However, one particular playwright whose contribution cannot be ignored is Bharati Sarabhai. She is the first woman playwright in the history of Indian English Drama. Being a Gujrati, she is also the first Indian playwright to reflect the impact of Gandhian thoughts in her plays (Naik 149). Her two plays, *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) show her understanding of and the love for Gandhi's ideology. *The Well of the People* is especially important because it is based "on a true story published in Gandhi's *Harijan*" (Naik 149).

The first remarkable feature that can be noted in the history of Indian Drama in this period is the dependence of the Indian playwrights on the Western traditions. The dramatic tradition of the Elizabethans and the ancient Greeks highly influence the Indian playwrights. This trait is very visible in the plays written by the three Bengali playwrights mentioned earlier. The second feature is the use of Indian mythical stories in the plays. This aspect can be located in the plays written by the South Indian playwrights in particular. The third significant aspect is the presence of Gandhi's philosophy and ideas in the plays. This is clearly traceable in the plays of Sarabhai. Thus, even though the journey of Indian English Drama is short during this period, its contributions to the Indian English literature cannot be ignored.

Activities:

1. Who wrote the first Indian English drama? Name the pre-independence Indian English playwrights.
2. What features do you find in the Indian English plays written during the pre-independence era?

4.13.4 Post-independence Indian English Drama (1947-1980)

The history of Indian English Drama in the post-independence phase is not very encouraging. In fact, like the other two major genres, Indian English Drama could not flourish during the post-independence period mainly because Indian playwrights tended to write plays in regional languages. Some playwrights obviously got the opportunity to stage their plays abroad like the US and England, but these plays written in English were not well received in India. Due to a curious lack of interest in plays written in English, the regional

language theatre during this period developed significantly. While discussing the development of Indian English Drama in the post-1947 scenario, Naik mentions the above stated reasons to point out the lack of development of Indian English Drama. He describes the scenario very appropriately, "... the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after Independence was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousins' tables" (255). Further, Naik states that though many initiatives were taken by the Indian government to "encourage the performing arts as an effective means of public enlightenment," all these initiatives ultimately led to the "growth of regional language theatre" (255). The establishment of National School of Drama in 1959, setting up of Sahitya Natak Akademi in 1952 and the decision to organise National Drama Festival in 1954 – all such state decisions proved to be futile in terms of the development of Indian English Drama (Naik 255). These playwrights mainly attempted to carry forward the tradition of poetic drama that was established by the dramatists of the pre-independence era. G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy are the three playwrights, who, according to Naik, wrote verse plays like the playwrights of the colonial era (256). Desani's *Hali* is an allegorical verse play which presents 'everyman's quest for fulfilment' (Naik 256). As a play, *Hali* is very rich, because it is a multilayered text. It also draws heavily from the Hindu mythology (Naik 257). Lakhan Deb's three blank verse plays, *Tiger Claw* (1967), *Vivekanand* (1972) and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) are historical dramas (Naik 257). His plays deal with historically famous characters, and his last play deals with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi (Naik 257). Among the playwrights of this period (1947-1980), Asif Currimbhoy's contribution to the field of Indian English Drama is noteworthy. He deviated from the convention of writing verse plays and wrote prose plays. His career as a dramatist is illustrious because he wrote almost thirty plays. Naik very pertinently points out the various themes of his plays: "History and current politics; social and economic problems; East-West encounter; psychological conflicts, and religion, philosophy and art – everything is grist to Currimbhoy's dramatic mill" (258). With such a huge range of themes, his plays assume a great significance in the canon of Indian English Drama. The other playwrights of this period are: Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurucharan Das and Girish Karnad. Sharma's plays are Bombay-centric and his two plays, *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970), effectively portray the bleak side of Bombay life. Though Ezekiel is chiefly a poet, he has written three plays, which show his "skilful use of ironical fantasy" (Naik 261). Gurucharan Das is known for his excellent representation of the colonial history of Punjab in his plays. Though he has written many plays, the only play that he wrote

during the period 1947-1980 is *Larins Sahib* (1970). As a historical play, it deals with Henry Lawrence of Punjab, and it also effectively presents the colonial background of India during the time when Henry Lawrence visited India (Naik 262). Girish Karnad is an eminent Indian English playwright. Most of his plays were staged and published after 1980, but the two plays, *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) appeared before 1980. These two plays were translated into English by Karnad. *Tughlaq* is a historical play while *Hayavadana* is a play about complex identity formation. Karnad's plays are known for his experimental techniques and intense debates related to psychological conflicts.

Thus, we can see that in the post-independence phase two tendencies in the canon of Indian English Drama are prominent. One is the continuation of the tradition of writing verse plays and the other is the attempt made by some eminent playwrights like Currimbhoy, Das and Karnad to infuse new themes and techniques. Despite the fact that most of the playwrights of this period modelled their plays on Western traditions of drama, some playwrights made sincere efforts to produce indigenous model of drama. This is clearly traceable in the plays of Currimbhoy, Das and Karnad. In fact, their efforts paved the way for new experimentations by future playwrights.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of the pre-independence Indian English playwrights. What are the common features you find in their plays?
2. Prepare a list of the important post-independence Indian English playwrights. What are the distinctive traits you find in the plays of this period?
3. It has been mentioned in the above section that Indian English Drama did not flourish like the other two major genres. What are the possible reasons for this lack of development in the field of Indian English Drama? Apart from the reasons mentioned above, can you give some more reasons?
4. Read some of the plays of Asif Currimbhoy. Do you consider him a versatile playwright? Give reasons.
5. Read the following two plays: Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib* and Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*. How are these two plays thematically different?

4.13.5 Summing Up

In this unit, an attempt has been made to study the history of the growth and evolution of Indian English Drama. While explaining the significant contribution of the Indian English

playwrights, this unit offers an extensive discussion on the dramatic art of the major playwrights of the post-independence era. The post-colonial period has indeed provided a fertile ground for production of plays containing themes that are relevant to the diverse cultures of our nation. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker elucidates the magnitude of growth of Indian theatre in the post-colonial era by emphasising the "performance practices" of "Indian drama" and its implicit bonding with different critical "discourses" (16).

4.13.6 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-Answer Type Questions

1. Assess the contribution of the major Indian English playwrights. How have these playwrights enriched the genre of Indian English Drama?
2. Make a brief survey of pre-independence Indian English Drama. What are the possible reasons for the lack of growth of this genre?

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Discuss the various themes that Asif Currimbhoy deals with in his plays.
2. Why is Girish Karnad important as a playwright? Assess the contribution of Karnad to the genre of Indian English Drama.

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. How did the Western tradition of drama influence the Bengali playwrights of the pre-independence period?
2. Name the playwrights who wrote history plays. Why are history plays important in the canon of Indian English Drama?

4.13.7 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 14 ❐ Mahesh Dattani: *Tara*

Structure

4.14.1 Objectives

This unit discusses Mahesh Dattani's two-act play, *Tara*. It seeks to critically interpret the play while examining the major themes, symbols and language used by the playwright. It also aims to acquaint the learners with Dattani's dramatic art.

4.14.2 Introduction

Dear students, you have to study *Tara*, a play written by Mahesh Dattani, who is a very important playwright of our times. Despite the fact that quite a good number of playwrights are writing in India today, Dattani cannot be clubbed together with them. This is because, first, he is a playwright who writes plays exclusively in English. Besides, his plays, and in particular, the language of his plays, resist translation to a great extent. This is because of his comfort level with English. He effortlessly handles English of ordinary spoken conversation in Indian spaces. However, it is important to study Dattani in the context of an obscure tradition of Indian English Drama. This tradition is obscure on account of its long absence in the grand canon of Indian English writing. Let us attempt to read Mahesh Dattani's contribution to Indian English drama by interrogating that absence.

Till only recently, literature departments across universities in India conveniently avoided the inclusion of Indian English play-texts in the syllabi of undergraduate or postgraduate programmes on the grounds of their being not literary enough. Most of the play texts that were included were translated from regional languages such as Marathi or Bangla, either translated by the authors themselves such as Tagore, or by others. These texts were conveniently passed off as plays belonging to the grand literary canon of Indian drama. This attitude, however, was quite contrary to the treatment meted out to poetry and fiction, most of which were original compositions in English. The reasons for Indian English drama not receiving its due status were many. The first reason was purely commercial. Western publishers were primarily interested in publishing fiction and poetry written by Indian authors. Besides, writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and G. V. Desani, in order to cater to the tastes of "dual readership", either chose to get their novels published from abroad or got veterans such as E. M. Forster, Graham Greene or Anthony Burgess, to pen prefaces or recommendations for themselves. The same privilege was not enjoyed by drama written in English by Indian authors. The second reason for the marginality of drama in the canon of Indian writing in English perhaps lay in its reach. The first drama in the English language, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta,* was scripted by Baboo Krishna Mohan Banerjea in 1831. Such plays were, however, branded as morose, lifeless, passive, having no entertainment value and theatricality. They were at best treated as literary fantasies by the playwrights who attempted to emulate the textual drama of British/Western authors. The language of these plays was allegedly artificial, as English was never the medium of spontaneous communication in the Indian public or private sphere. Hence drama, the essence of which lies in its natural communicative medium, would not patronize such artificiality in its scripted dialogue. Such a dialogue aimed at emulating the language of Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama. However, the themes of such plays were inseparable from the socio-political matrix of the then India. Banerjea's play *The Persecuted* was based on the events related to the Bengal Renaissance and Raja Rammohan Roy's objective of rescuing India from the darkness of superstition, blind faith, religious dogmatism, and of the unprecedented political chaos of the time. Another play, written two decades later, *Is This Civilization?* by Michel Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), too, was based on the same objectives, although this play is more known as a translated play than an original English composition. Dutt, however, has a play originally composed in English called *Rizia: Empress of Inde: A Dramatic Fragment* (1860). After this, we have the likes of Sri Aurobindo, who wrote between 1890 and 1920, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya who wrote between 1918 and 1950, A.S. Panchapakesa

Aiyer who wrote between 1913 and 1942, T. P. Kailasam who wrote between 1930 and 1945, and many others. They followed the trend of writing drama in English, irrespective of their commercial prospects and production quotients. Most of the plays written by these playwrights were not plays proper; they were rather dramatized debates on the burning issues of the day and on the new ideas introduced by Western education. A catalogue of plays written originally in English by the above playwrights is available in Krishna S. Bhatta's book *Indian Drama in English* and *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* edited by M. K. Naik.

Activities:

1. Do you think that Mahesh Dattani can be clubbed together with other playwrights writing now in English? Think of the reasons for your answer.
2. Consult any authentic book on Indian English literature and prepare a list of early Indian English playwrights.
3. Prepare a list of Indian English playwrights contemporary to Dattani.
4. Students may read Lakshmi Chandra's introductory chapter titled The History of Indian Drama in English in *Lights On: Indian Plays in English*, Volume 1, published by Orient Black Swan.

4.14.3 Mahesh Dattani: Life and Works

Mahesh Dattani, in his book *Me and My* Plays (2014), fondly recollects his first date with theatre as a child in Bangalore. The architecture of Town Hall in the city with its majestic columns and arches mesmerized the nine-year-old Mahesh as he gradually soaked up the atmosphere of the auditorium, and the world of the play. A willing suspension of disbelief, as you can imagine, did the trick. The child almost believed in the fiction of a gun-shot targeted at a man seated in the front row. Much later, Dattani came to know that the play he had watched that day was an acclaimed Gujrati play by Madhu Rye. *Me and My Plays* narrates similar fond memories of Mahesh Dattani and his journey towards becoming a playwright. If you read this book, you will come to know several such incidents about Dattani the man and the playwright.

Born in Bangalore in 1958 of Gujarati parents, Dattani took a keen interest in theatre right from early childhood when his parents had once taken him to watch this Gujarati play. When in college, Dattani actively engaged himself in theatrical productions, participating in workshops, and finally ending up directing a Woody Allen play called *God!* When he founded Playpen, his own theatre company, he took it up as a mission to

produce Indian plays in English. The English which Dattani wished to use as his medium of theatre was the English spoken in the urban metropolis of India. This is the English he had grown up with, a hybrid language with overtones of Indianisms, a spontaneously spoken language, understood in an uninhibited way in urban India. In an interview Mahesh Dattani fondly recollects how the culture of the convent in the Indian metropolis shaped his linguistic idiosyncrasy. At the Christian institution Baldwin, the day began by the singing of hymns in the chapel during the morning assembly. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri notes, "[t]he medium of communication was strictly English and speaking in the vernacular in school was frowned upon" (16). Chaudhuri goes on to quote Dattani who recollects how "unpleasant distinctions were made between the 'vernies' and the ones who were fluent in English. Snob values were inculcated early on and you generally were made to feel privileged to belong to that school" (16). The above biographical reference might provide vital clues in gauging the audience of the theatre that he was about to create in due course of time. This is a theatre which employs the medium of English to confront a wide range of issues such as marriage, gender and sexuality, incest and child abuse, religious tensions in post-independence India, A.I.D.S, and explores a whole range of human relationships in the matrix of urban India. However, it must be remembered that his audience has been limited. Chaudhuri clarifies this point when she observes:

> Given his chosen medium of expression, the language of his plays obviously restricts a wider, more expansive, grassroots audience in India. That is not exactly the kind of audience that he is looking for, in any case, as he claims that he writes for the urban Indian upper and middle class audience and not for the working class audience. (19)

In a talk delivered in February 2001, Dattani, frankly introspecting upon a question which he had asked himself, "Why do I do theatre? What is in it for me?" (Dattani, "Contemporary Indian Theatre" 469), explains:

> [i]t becomes important to do the kind of theatre that means something to you personally and also to do the kind of theatre which engages you enough for you to relate to in the way I have spoken about. Only then is there the true synergy between the artist and audience. (Dattani, "Contemporary Indian Theatre" 470)

From the playwright's own admission, it becomes very clear that he was primarily writing plays which have their roots in the urban social space. The sites of the first performances of his plays were also in the cities. His first stage play *Where There's a Will* was first performed by the playwright's own company called Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial

Hall, Bangalore, on September 23, 1988, as part of the Deccan Herald Festival. It is important to note that the site of first performance of the play happens to be Bangalore, a metropolitan city by its own right, with a fairly large number of non-native English speakers. His second play *Dance Like a Man* was similarly first performed at the same site in the following year on 22 September, as part of the same festival hosted by the same major print-media house, *The Deccan Herald*. The next play *Twinkle Tara* was first performed by the same company and at the same site on 23 October 1990. *Bravely Fought the Queen* was first performed at Sophia Bhabha Hall in Mumbai on 2 August 1991, directed by the playwright himself. *Final Solutions*, Dattani's next play, was performed for the first time in Bangalore again at the Guru Nanak Bhavan on 10 July 1993. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* was performed for the first time in Mumbai again at the Tata Theatre on 23 November 1998. *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, which was initially composed as a radio play, and broadcast by the BBC Radio on 9 January 1999, was first performed on the stage on 6 August 1999, at the Museum Theatre, Chennai. The next two plays – *The Swami and Winston* and *Tale of the Mother Feeding Her Child* – were also radio plays, both broadcast by the BBC Radio in 2000. The next play *Thirty Days in September* (2001) was commissioned by an N.G.O. called R.A.H.I. committed to the rehabilitation of children suffering from the trauma of child abuse and incest. It was performed for the first time in Mumbai in 2001. Among his recently written plays, *Brief Candle* was first performed on 5 July 2009 at Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai, by Prime Time Theatre Company, *The Girl Who Touched the Stars*, a radio play, was first broadcast on 6 March 2007 on BBC Radio 4. Moreover, the theatre groups and institutions with which Dattani has always been associated since the beginning of his career as playwright, are all based in Bangalore, be it Playpen or the National Institute for Advanced Study, Bangalore.

Activities:

1. Gather some more information regarding Dattani's work *Me and My Plays*.
2. Write a biographical profile of Dattani, including all the works he was ascribed with.
3. Imagine the kind of audience attending the performances of Dattani's plays and write a few lines on them.

4.14.4 Introduction to the Text

Let us open this section with an interesting anecdote on how *Tara* initially was almost a jinxed play. It is narrated by Mahesh Dattani himself in *Me and My Plays*. Once in

Mumbai when Alyque Padamsee (popularly known as God in advertising circles) and his wife Sharon invited Dattani and his production troupe of *Dance Like a Man* to dinner at their home near Sophia Auditorium, Alyque wanted to know what he was working on next.

> I told him it was a play with a bizarre plot involving conjoined twins and their emotional separation over the years. He loved the concept and asked me to send him the first draft by post – this was, after all, the pre-Internet era of the late 1980s...I called the play 'Twinkle Tara' and did a production of my own in Bangalore for the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. It was a huge success. (Dattani, *Me and My Plays* 27-28)

When however, Alyque chose to direct it, he removed "Twinkle" from the title and called it just "Tara." And then, as Dattani nostalgically recollects how *Tara* almost earned the jinxed tag for itself:

> In the theatre, many people, especially the English, consider Macbeth to be a jinxed play and call it 'the Scottish play' lest the mention of the play bring bad luck. Many laugh it off. But with *Tara* I can aver with proof that it was indeed jinxed – or at least Alyque's production was. The first calamity was that Alyque fell off the stage during the technical rehearsal and had to be rushed to the hospital. He had broken an arm. A car ran over producer Raell Padamsee's foot and she ended up with a good part of her leg in a cast. If both the producer and the director with limbs in casts did not seem calamitous enough, something more tragic happened. Pratap Roy, a fine stage actor who was playing Dr Thakkar in the play, died of a heart attack soon after the third performance. It just was too scary. (28-29)

Dattani then goes on to suggest that perhaps the severed "Twinkle" from the title may have been the cause of the jinx. However, it was the Alec Padamsee production of *Tara* which established Mahesh Dattani as a playwright with promise in the eye of the national media, as Dattani fondly recollects.

4.14.5 Summary of the Play

By now you already know that *Tara*, a two act play, tells the story of a conjoined twin, a boy, Chandan, and a girl, Tara. They are surgically separated in an unequal manner intended to favour the boy. However, it turns out that the surgical procedure that separates Chandan and Tara was preferential to Chandan both physiologically as well as symbolically. It is revealed later in the play that on account of a consciously taken decision by Mrs Patel

and her father (the twin's grandfather), a limb that originally and organically belonged to the girl child, was unethically surgically removed and 'gifted' to the male child Chandan. The decision boomerangs as the body of the child rejects the implanted limb, and it has to be ultimately amputated. Chandan suffers from a terrible guilt over Tara's disadvantaged life and early death due to kidney failure. He migrates from India, his native land, to England, where he attempts to begin life anew, repressing memories of his personal history. He changes his name to the Westernized "Dan." Dattani's play is intended to portray the struggle of an ancient Eastern civilization attempting to conform to modern, Western values. There seems to be a mismatch between the historically subordinate role of women in traditional Indian society and India's ambitions of emerging as a major global power. India has one-billion-plus population and has already achieved some technological advancement. Cultural traditions that place far lower value on female life than on that of a male become the objects of attack in *Tara*. The emotional bond that exists between Chandan and Tara refreshingly brings humour to this otherwise grave modern tragedy. Chandan notes, "The way we started in life. Two lives and one body in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out – and separated."

Activities:

1. Go through the play and decide which title – "Twinkle Tara" or "Tara" – seems to be more appropriate.
2. What do you mean by a 'conjoined twin'? Do a little bit of research on the physical / physiognomical and mental conditions of a conjoined twin.
3. Reflect on why Dattani employs the problem of conjoined twin (a boy and a girl) at the centre of the plot of the play.

4.14.6 Analysis of the Text

Stagecraft/Significance of the Multiple Stage-Levels:

The reading of a Dattani play can never be complete without a concerted study of the stage space. If we are on the look-out for a single word to describe Dattani's stagecraft or his use of stage space, we may opt for the word "cerebral." By splitting the stage space into multiple levels, he engages audience attention with a cerebral exploration of multiple spaces and time zones. The archives of history, memory continuously engage with the present within the spatiality of Dattani's stage. It generates an encounter of sorts, which become the ultimate food for theatre.

The stage is split into three levels. The lowest level that happens to be the major space of action actually represents the past recollected through memory, the memory of Dan or Chandan, the protagonist. This level represents the house of the Patels. On this level, the playwright has also reserved some space along the cyclorama in an L shape, for the representation of the "galli outside the Patels' house." In other words, it is the neighbourhood of the Patels, suggested by cross-lighting. The second level represents the present in which the aged Chandan at present, referred to as Dan, is on a bedsitter in a "seedy suburb of London," thousands of miles away from home, beside the writing table and a small bed in the foreground. There is typewriter on the table with a sheaf of papers. This is the only realistic level in which Dan is shown as relentlessly engaged in the act of typing notes as the play begins. The entire action of the play visually recreates the entries in Dan's relentlessly typed diary-pages. Students, you are requested to note the body-language of Dan in the play in the first scene itself. Here he is shown on one occasion to be limping as he walks across from his bedsitter to a cabinet to pour himself a drink. He seems to be suffering from some kind of disability, evident from his body-language. As you read the play, you would gain clarity on the action. The third level is a static level and is situated at a slightly higher position in which the character referred to as Dr Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. He is not a witness to the action of the play, but his presence is overarching, as the playwright indicates in the stage directions.

Activities:

1. Students reading Dattani for the first time may note that the playwright's genius lies in his fusion of stage spaces. He splits up the stage space in quite a number of plays such as *Final Solutions*, *Thirty Days in September* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Through such a theatrical trick, he simultaneously captures two or more time frames not just in stasis, but in action. Dialogues belonging to different spatialities effortlessly are juxtaposed for the cerebral engagement of the playgoer.

Read the plays mentioned above to have a glimpse of Dattani's art, almost in the manner of a cinematographer splitting up the screen to juxtapose two different time frames or spaces for visual effect.

4.14.7 Act-Wise Summary with Critical Comments

ACT -I

If you carefully read the first soliloquy of Dan, with which the play begins, you will discover a unique meta-theatrical scheme carefully and subtly introduced by the playwright.

You may wonder what meta-theatre means. You must have come across the word "metafiction" in studies on works of fiction such as Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In these works the narrators seem to be consciously aware of their acts of narration, time and again referring to the art of story-telling or narrative schemes employed in the art of making fictions. Frequently such narrators relapse into a dialogue with the intended reader and in the process break the spell of the world of fiction, the "willing suspension of disbelief." This is what is popularly known as the metafictional tendency in fiction, a fiction about the art of making fiction. Dattani, the playwright uses a similar teaser, making Chandan or Dan, the aged protagonist of the play a playwright in the act of crafting an Indian English play called "Twinkle Tara," "a drama in two acts by Chandan Patel." Ironically, he seems to be aware of the sardonic snipes generally aimed at Indian English writing in the 1990s, especially in India. Hence, like most authors, he has moved abroad and is desperate to grab the attention of "the average Western intellectual", as "back home, of course, Indo-Anglian literature isn't worth toilet paper."

To come back to the soliloquy, Dan confesses that he is angry, angry with the world, with his family and the social institutions that have perpetrated a raw deal to both him and his twin sister Tara. He confesses that his chief objective of writing the play is "to masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger" (Dattani, *CP Vol 1* 324). Besides, he makes an attempt through the proposed play to retrieve repressed memories and the guilt pertaining to his "separation" from his conjoined twin sister Tara. Thus, Dattani's *Tara* is primarily a memory-play.

After the short soliloquy, the action shifts from the realistic stage level to the next level of action on the ground level of the stage. This second level is, as pointed out earlier, is the Patels' living room. The archive of Dan's memory which churns the action of the play forward vacillates primarily between two spaces – the living room of the Patels after the eventful surgery that separates the conjoined twins, and the clinic of Dr Thakkar, in which a 'conspiracy' is played out. This 'conspiracy' is gradually revealed in a typical 'whodunnit' manner as the play progresses. To remind readers once again, the Chandan-Tara relationship which you encounter in the first act is actually after the eventful surgery. The memory-narrative of this Act therefore clings on to and vacillates between two distinct time-frames, one before the surgery and the other after. Seemingly after the surgery, Chandan and Tara are shown as grown-up siblings, both walking with limps on different legs. As the lights cross-fade to their living room, they are shown playing a game of cards. It appears that they share a very close bonding. Mr Patel, the sibling's

father, insists on Chandan accompanying him to office while Chandan prefers to stay back, preferring Tara instead of himself for the job, as he feels, "She'll make a great business woman" (328). Patel however makes it quite clear that Tara is not wanted there and that it is Chandan who ought to join work. Dattani subtly hints at 'sexual politics' at work here in Patel's insistence on the suitability of the male offspring taking over the reins of work, and not the girl child. Tara, slightly hurt at her father bias, sarcastically comments, "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave." Chandan complements her saying, "I haven't decided yet...I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle" (328). Bharati Patel, their mother, on occasions, hints at a medical impairment in Tara for which she has been losing weight drastically, as had been observed by her doctor at the clinic that morning. Patel at the same time refers to a certain clinical "progress," assessed by the doctors after the eventful surgery, that was about to be mentioned in a medical journal. It is important, dear students, to note here that both Chandan and Tara are conscious of themselves as having been subjected to, first, a clinical and, then, a surgical case study, involving the three basic units of a scientific experiment – observation, experiment and inference – in a laboratory. Chandan scripts a mock-interview in his play. This interview involving a dialogue between Dr Thakkar and Dan provides the graphic details of a surgery conducted in the past, "a most unique and complex surgery, the first of its kind in India" (333). The following extract from the text may be studied closely:

> DR THAKKAR. To start with, the patients were only a few months old and....
>
> DAN. How old were they exactly?
>
> DR THAKKAR. Oh, three months.
>
> DAN (mock surprised). Three months? Was the surgery really necessary?
>
> DR THAKKAR. Yes, absolutely. Surgery was their only chance of survival. You see, they were twins, conjoined twins, conjoined from the chest down.
>
> DAN. Siamese twins?
>
> DR THAKKAR. Yes. That is the common term used for them.
>
> DAN. Is it a rare phenomenon?
>
> DR THAKKAR. Conjoined twins are quite rare. I think one in every fifty thousand twin conceptions could have a probability of containing this...defect. (331)

The conversation gears up to provide further medical details on how the conjoinment of two different fertilized eggs may develop into a conjoined twin, the conjoinment forming from the breastbone down through the pelvic area. Moreover, when asked about the special case of the Patel twin, the conversation exposes Dr Thakkar's marvel at the discovery that, contrary to the general convention, that conjoined twins developing from one fertilized ovum are invariably of the same sex, here was a special case for a new entry in the annals of medical literature. The twins were of different sexes, a very rare case, as pointed out by Dr Thakkar, resulting from not one, but two different fertilized eggs.

As the narrative of the play jumps back to the past, it appears from the conversation between Mr Patel and his wife Bharati, that Tara's physical condition has worsened following a kidney disorder, and that the family is in desperate search for a donor. It is important to remember here in the light of Dr Thakkar's observations that each of the twins had been sharing one kidney each since their separation. Apart from the kidneys, the twins did not share any other vital organ as revealed by the X Ray reports and scan results. But in order to maintain the suspense in the plot, Dr Thakkar's revelation in this scene is cut short. He only hints at the revelation of more details on the pelvic region of the conjoined twins and the "extent of conjoinment there." After this the stage lights cross-fade to the Patel living room. More scattered hints are thrown in here and there in this scene on Bharati's desire to reveal some other secret to Tara, to which her husband Patel objects:

> BHARATI. All right! You want me to be all right? Yes, I will do it.
>
> PATEL. Good. I will call him (the doctor) right now.
>
> BHARATI. I will tell her.
>
> *Patel stops*.
>
> I will tell them everything.
>
> *Patel goes to her and slaps her. The moment she recovers, Bharati looks at him with some triumph.*
>
> PATEL. You wouldn't dare tell them. Not you. Please don't! Not yet!
>
> BHARATI. Then let me do what I want to do.
>
> PATEL. (defeated). You cannot tell them. For their sake, don't! (*Looks at her suddenly with determination*.) If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you. (345)

A dark secret seems to haunt the Patel couple, which Dan the playwright gradually reveals in retrospect, as he scripts his play, a secret about Tara. The content of the secret, though not revealed completely, finds a parallel in an apparently insignificant comment made by Roopa, a neighbour. She makes a snipe at the Patels' obsession with milk, when it came to feeding girl-children. In other words, the Patels were so passionately patriarchal that they disowned new-born girl-children by drowning them to death in milk. Students are advised to note down the following conversation between Chandan, Roopa and Tara in Act I:

> ROOPA. Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk....so that when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk. (349)

Roopa's taunts at the Patel tradition must be read as being wound up with serious gender-related questions which Dattani poses through the play. These are the questions that may be considered to be archaic or medieval in modern urban India theoretically, but in praxis the domestic spaces of urban India even today are infested with such prejudiced gender practices. Dattani regulates his calibrated snipe at such attitudes relentlessly in this play. A little later when Chandan is shown to be helping his mother with knitting, Mr Patel does not miss the opportunity to snub at his wife for teaching Chandan how to knit. He bursts out at his son first: "Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!" (351), and then targets his wife: "But you can think of turning him into a sissy –teaching him to knit!" (351).

ACT II

This act is primarily an *anagnorisis* for the spectator. Those of you who are acquainted with Aristotle's *Poetics* must have come across this term in his assessment of a play. This a revelatory act in which Dan, as the writer of his play, reveals the truth about himself and Tara, and primarily about the culmination of the medical experiment of Dr Thakkar. The revelations unfold through a narration of certain factual details about the complications involving the separation of the twins:

> DR THAKKAR. Complications were expected. Our team of doctors were aware of that. The pelvic region, as I had mentioned before, was a problem. There was only one bladder and it belonged to the boy. So did the rectum. We would have to have an artificial one made for the girl. Later on, when she grows up, we can fashion one

> from her intestinal tissues. And the boy's lungs aren't fully developed. However, considering the magnitude of the work involved, this was a minor detail. The prognosis, on the whole, was favourable to both. Nature had done a near-complete job. (356)

Ironically however, Dan reveals immediately before the above speech, "Poor Tara. Even nature gave her a raw deal" (356). Dr Thakkar's assertion of nature's near-perfect job clearly contradicts both his and Dan's revelations, as readers/spectators are about to gather later. Dr Thakkar later reveals, "Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it" (376). Tara however survived, despite the odds pitted against her. But one particular "oddity" stood out, as revealed by her father Mr Patel: "There were problems, you know them. But there was one complication which hadn't been discussed. There were three legs" (377). This oddity had to be negotiated by the Patel couple, and it is at this juncture that a decision is taken, on which the premise of the entire play stands.

Dear students, you are requested to carefully go through the final confession of Mr Patel which may be read as the *anagnorisis* of the play:

> PATEL: A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive ...on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come. That same evening, your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except – I couldn't believe what she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy...Maybe if I had protested more strongly! I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realize that it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home – the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land – in the heart of the city – from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used. A few days later, the surgery was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs – for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have – might have – been Tara. Because of the unusual nature of the operation, it was easy to pass it off as a natural rejection. I – I was meaning to tell you both when you were older, but... (378)

The revelation of Mrs Patel's decision favouring the boy-child at the cost of her daughter's complex physical condition thus forms the *anagnorisis* of Dattani's play Tara, after which the play proceeds towards its natural *telos* or ending, with Chandan gradually coming to

terms with a tragedy, the memory of which he has unable to set aside, despite the death of his sister years later.

4.14.8 Plot Function

From your reading of the above analysis of the two acts of the play, it is clear that Dattani primarily derives his effect from his treatment of information. In other words, the desired dramatic effect of the play largely arises out of the way Dattani manages the release and suppression of information, skilfully vacillating between time and space. This typical handling of plot almost resembles a whodunit narrative or a detective thriller. Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd in their book *Studying Plays* have called this method "actantial analysis." Commenting on the analysis of dramatic texts, they observe:

> A useful conception here is that of actantial analysis. Deriving from a study of Russian folk tales, this model is especially relevant to quest narratives...Basically, the idea is that there are various functions to be fulfilled by the characters in order for the narrative to operate. For instance, there needs to be a hero (called the 'subject of the quest'), an object of the quest (what is being sought by the hero – may be a lost sister, or the answer to a question), a helper and an antagonist. Characters in a quest narrative can be seen as different sorts of 'actants', that is, as fulfilling these basic roles. Many dramatic texts are themselves quest narratives...An 'actantial analysis' of a dramatic script regards characters purely in their mutual relation to the quest – though this and the object of the quest may change. (28)

You may thus begin to use the same model of 'actantial analysis' to understand how Dattani proceeds to dramatise Dan's quest. In the process, his quest becomes the reader's/ spectator's quest.

Activities:

Visualise the play in performance. Please remember that a 'playtext' is not designed to function in the same way as words in a novel or a poem. The text is designed to become a performance. So, your ability to visualise drama on the stage is the basis for all commentary and analysis. Therefore your 'reading' of the text of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* must be different from your reading of the text of a poem or a novel. Here is a selection of some typical tasks which might be useful for you in analysing and interpreting the play:

1. Identify the principal dramatic effects used by Dattani to build up the plot, particularly his use of memory, flashbacks etc.

2. How has Dattani used stage space in this play?
3. Trace the evolution of the plot of the play leading to the resolution (*dénouement*). Also, consult Aristotle's definition of plot as recorded in the *Poetics*. Find out the meaning of 'anagnorisis.'
4. Consider the view of any other character apart from Chandan, for Dattani relies primarily upon the point of view of Chandan. You may imagine Tara's point of view or even Roopa's.
5. Identify the point in the play which elicits an edge-of-the-seat kind of a response from the audience, in other words, a central climactic point where an audience is expected to experience the maximum amount of tension/suspense.
6. Describe the relationship between Chandan and Tara. Why does Chandan wish to forget Tara at the end of the play?
7. List the number the 'secrets' you come across in the play.

4.14.9 Critical Approaches to Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

A play at a very basic level assumes a certain amount of shared knowledge on the part of an audience. It is from this awareness that an audience detects its genre. Genre, as you all know, is a word of Latin origin meaning 'kind', or a categorisation. To fit a work of art, a play or a film in this case, within the framework of a genre, amounts to identifying it as 'tragedy', 'comedy', 'thriller', 'farce', 'horror', 'family social' etc. After the recognition of the category, the audience begins to interpret its validity or its effectiveness, and draw certain expectations about its content. It is from here that a critical approach to a play evolves. The audience gradually develops a technique for the understanding of the play in question. A murder mystery, for example, would automatically signal a formalistic approach. There the interpreter would begin to assess how effectively the dramatist has been able to build up suspense through the crafting of the plot. However, as a student of literature, you have to be familiar with the most suitable approach to the play taken up for study. In this case, a study of *Tara* would automatically involve two major approaches. The first approach is the formalist approach, already introduced earlier, which would involve a careful re-reading of the plot, the unravelling of action through the memory of Dan. An 'actantial analysis,' as discussed earlier, may be considered, accompanied by a close reading of the text. The culmination of the 'quest' of the protagonist, leading to a discovery by the audience may also be read in the light of Aristotle's definition of 'anagnorisis' (discovery) as stated earlier. Aristotle, in Chapter 10 of the *Poetics* describes

the phenomenon of 'anagnorisis' in dramatic literature: "A Discovery is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune" (Bywater 47). Aristotle further adds, "The best of all Discoveries, however, is that arising from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident..." (60). Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* therefore, may be subject to a formalistic scrutiny in the light of both the actantial model as well as the classical Aristotelian model.

The second approach may involve a reading of certain pertinent and burning issues related with gender studies. From this perspective the play provides a caustic attack on gender stereotypes, challenging age old notions of masculinity and femininity. Chandan, the male protagonist of *Tara,* has never been groomed according to set notions of masculinity, which is why he and his mother Mrs Patel are perfectly comfortable with his expertise in knitting and helping with the domestic chores. Ironically, however, it is the same Mrs Patel who had once decided to risk donating the residual limb to the boy child Chandan despite all odds, compromising the life of their twin daughter *Tara*. The surgery becomes a failure as the limb does not suit the boy and is left to rot. As a man, Chandan is perfectly comfortable with the idea of playing jig-saw puzzle at home and Tara, his sister, going out to work. The opening conversation between Patel and Chandan expose the deeply entrenched stereotype perpetuated by what Luce Irigaray calls "male libidinal economy" (422), an economic model legitimized and perpetuated through centuries debarring the woman from entering into the work sphere that was reserved for the male. The woman's role was conveniently confined to the domestic sphere, and her body especially demarcated for the production of healthy offsprings, who would later contribute to the economy further. A close reading of the opening conversation exposes these entrenched stereotypes:

> *The lights cross-fade to the living room, Bharati has exited to the kitchen.*
>
> PATEL: Chandan.
>
> CHANDAN: (dealing the cards). Ya.
>
> PATEL: I was just thinking...It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me. (Glances surrepticiously towards the kitchen.)
>
> CHANDAN. What for?
>
> PATEL. Just to get a feel of it.
>
> CHANDAN. You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman.
>
> TARA. How do you know?
>
> CHANDAN. Because you always cheat at cards!

TARA: Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.

CHANDAN. I haven't decided yet. (Looks at Patel) I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle.

TARA. Or carve another story on the walls...He's a writer, you know. (327-328)

A little later Patel's backlash is evident. Not being able to confront his son and daughter, he taunts his wife for having 'wrongly' groomed her son, teaching him how to knit and help with the household chores:

PATEL: What are you two doing?

CHANDAN. Mummy's knitting and I'm helping her sort out her mistake.

PATEL. Let Tara do it.

CHANDAN. It's okay.

PATEL. Give it to her.

CHANDA. Why?

BHARATI. It's all right, I'll manage. Leave it.

CHANDAN. I will just roll all this and...

PATEL. Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!

BHARATI (frantically). Go! Chandan, just go!

PATEL (to Bharati). How dare you do this to him?

CHANDAN. Wait a minute, daddy, she never asked me to do any...

PATEL. Can't you even look after the children?

CHANDAN. Look Daddy, it's...

PATEL. What did you do the whole day, huh? Watch video?

BHARATI. I can't think of things for them to do all the time!

PATEL: But you can think of turning him into a sissy – teaching him to knit.

CHANDAN. Daddy, that's unfair.

...

PATEL. I am disappointed in you. From now on you are coming to the office with me. I can't see you rotting at home! (351)

It would be advisable for students to cross refer to another play by Dattani called *Dance Like a Man*. In this play too the playwright addresses similar questions on stereotyped

notions of gender within the discourse of patriarchy. The play exposes how modern urban Indian society would react even today to a man who takes to dance, not just as a hobby, but also as a career. The play is about the importance of choices within the parameters of gender. In *Tara* the entire conspiracy of favouring the male child compromising the life of the daughter by the Patel couple exposes the hypocrisy-laden modern urban India, savouring the fruits of advanced medical research and technology while at the same time patronising medieval gender biases surreptitiously. Dr Thakkar's self-proclaimed advertisements of the rapid progress of medical technology scattered across the narrative of *Tara* are pitted against the gross violation of medical ethics and human values. He decides to stoop to the unethical demand of the Mrs Patel to 'gift' to Chandan what would have easily become Tara's limb. The operation naturally runs the risk of a physiological rejection. The family's worst fears come true when the limb has to be amputated after the rejection of Chandan's body. Mrs Patel's unethical demand arises out of the same notion of male libidinal economy discussed earlier. Hence, dear students, you may attempt an interpretation of this play in the light of Gender Studies.

Activities:

Students are advised to read two other plays by Mahesh Dattani which address similar gender issues:

A. *Dance like a Man*

B. *Bravely Fought the Queen*

4.14.10 Language of the Play

As any successful dramatic production ought to communicate in the spoken language of a culture, Indian English drama has had its share of resistance and opposition from a section of critics that has never regarded English as a natural medium of communication (both in practice as well as in the theatre) in India. The urban connect of the English language in modern India compelled playwrights to reconsider the idiom of theatrical communication in urban India, amidst the growing popularity of literary drama amidst the urban elite since the colonial era. Rashmi Sadana in her book *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India* offers some background information on her identification of "urban elites":

> To speak of urban elites is to refer to the class of people (the rich, the upper middle class, and many sectors of the middle classes, who also tend to be upper caste) who

> are educated from primary school onward with English as their medium of instruction. The rest of India, about 80 percent of Indians have, until recently, tended to be educated in government schools that may teach English as a subject but whose medium of instruction is one of the thirteen other official state languages. (4)

Sadana further notes: "English is spoken fluently by close to 5 percent of Indians and is 'known' by as much as 10 percent of the population (i.e., about 50 million to 100 million people of a population of just over one billion" (14). One must note here that despite the negligible percentage, the actual number of speakers is large. It is the numerical strength coupled with its place in the global order of things that makes English an Indian language on its own right. "Its place in the global order of things and the fact that it is entwined with modern, urban culture give English great prestige in the Indian context, while its lack of regional specificity within India often marks it as being culturally inauthentic" (15). English thus is the language of modern urban India, and hence today deserves to be fit for becoming the language of popular culture that includes cinema, and theatre. Sadana's observations on the connections between place, language, and textual production may be seen in the light of our understanding of English theatre in India and the urban consciousness. Sadana refers to an article titled "Jab They Met" written by Anjali Puri and published in the November 12 edition of the *Outlook.* It addresses the issue of the influx of English into the Hindi heartland of India through Hindi magazines and consequently the urbanisation of the consciousness of non-urban and non-metropolis India, particularly in cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur, Meerut, Agra and Varanasi:

> It spoke of how young people wanted to "get into the mode" of English. The aim of editors in such a mixing of languages was to reach "aspirational readers" – defined as people aged eighteen to thirty-five who wanted to live their lives partly in English and be part of the consumer revolution – and to use the English language "especially for descriptions of modular kitchens, cutlery, electronic gadgetry, career options and college festivals." (5)

We may note here that the phrase "get into the mode of English" ascribed to "aspirational readers" refers to getting into the urban mindset, as there is a definite connection between English and the urban India. The emergence of drama in English in modern India thus must be seen as a postcolonial aesthetic evolution. This evolution stands parallel to the gradual urbanisation of consciousness of modern India that includes the rise of the English language as an indispensable part of modern life. Moreover, in the pre-independence era, whenever writers with a strong command over English attempted to script drama in English, it adopted a certain imitative function, in the act of imitating the colonial master.

They did not adopt the representative function that English serves today in the age of global consumerism. Writing in English, and in particular, writing plays in English was a way of displaying the Indian writer's command over the language gifted by the colonial masters, even if it amounted to slavish imitation of Shakespeare or Marlowe. A close reading of the opening dialogue compositions of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's play *Rizia: Empress of Inde: A Dramatic Fragment* composed in 1860 would definitely repel the ordinary English speaking Indian of today, but may at the same time become a subject of scrutiny for scholars pursuing early Indian drama in English:

SCENE I

Enter Altunia and Kabric

Alt: O 'tis a shame past utterance! Tell me not
I'd rather that you, vile idolator,
Trod on my father's grave – aye, built upon it
His idol'd shrines for damned rites obscene!
What must a loathsome wretch – a cursed slave
Clasp in his foul embrace the queen, who sits
Upon the mighty throne of boundless Inde,
To revel in harlot rites –

Kab Nay – gentle friend!
For these be words which echo must not hear
To blab with that controlless tongue of hers.
I too have heard it darkly whisper'd round
That our Abassan friend – but such a tale...
So wild – so strange – Altunia!
Dost think 'tis true? (641)

English speaking theatre/cinema audiences of today may surely sarcastically brush aside such dialogues as archaic, affected and artificial. This is one of the reasons for which English drama, even in those days failed to find acceptance among theatre-goers, as theatre has always anticipated the tone and tenor of the spoken voice in its dialogues. However, a significant change was initiated in the post-independence era in the use of English in literary discourse by Nissim Ezekiel, both in his poetry and drama. Ezekiel allows the free flow of the English language with its unique Indian flavours to private

spheres and spaces of the Indian household. The spaces like kitchens and drawing rooms (even streets) were not held to be hospitable to the free and spontaneous flow of the language. One must remember here that playwrights such as Ezekiel, and later Karnad, did not want to fool audiences into a willing suspension of disbelief by showcasing characters (who otherwise do not normally converse in English) using the language effortlessly. The scripting of drama can never be successful if it fails to capture the living language of the *dramatis personae*.

Following the tradition set by Ezekiel, Dattani's English in all his plays appear spontaneously natural as a medium of communication in the city where the language flows freely from the English medium educational institutions to the realms of popular culture. A snippet of conversation from *Tara* may demonstrate how Dattani goes beyond the colonial hangovers of English in dramatic usage and exploits not just the ordinary Indian's acquisition, but naturalization too, of the language, for a distinctive hierarchical function. Tara and Chandan, marginalized by their peers for being differently abled, uses their mastery over English as a weapon to mock the 'vernies', as Dattani puts it in *Me and My Plays.* When Roopa, the neighbour, does not understand the metaphor of "two peas in a pod," and mistakenly replaces 'pod' with 'pot,' the twins have a hearty laugh at the expense of their non-English speaking or less-English knowing peers. This exclusivity or privilege enjoyed by Chandan and Tara becomes their weapon of mockery to face up to a world with a 'challenged' mindset. Roopa becomes the modern Indian Mrs Malaprop who repeatedly reduces herself to an object of mockery for her slips. We may cite the example of the following conversation from Act I of *Tara*:

> BHARATI. More coffee for you Roopa?
>
> ROOPA. No, thank you aunty. (*To Chandan*) Your mother's coffee is really somerhing.
>
> *Bharati exits to the kitchen.*
>
> CHANDAN. Ida makes it.
>
> ROOPA. Really? But it has the typical Southie flavour. I think it's the – you know – concoction.
>
> CHANDAN. Concoction?
>
> TARA. She means decoction.
>
> ROOPA. Decoction – yes, of course! How silly of me.... (346)

Mahesh Dattani writes at a time when English has been naturalized in the Indian landscape. In his plays the language pours out from the elite circles of the posh locales of the city

and enters into ordinary households. Characters belonging to diverse socio-economic backgrounds comfortably speak in English with its Indian flavours and accents.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of reasons why common man's English should be incorporated in Indian English drama.
2. Name the plays Nissim Ezekiel wrote. Why should they be considered innovative from linguistic point of view?
3. Who is Mrs. Malaprop? Give some examples of her use of English.
4. Cite from *Tara* some examples of common man's English.

4.14.11 Summing Up

As students of literature at the degree level, you are being relentlessly introduced to the world of texts. However, at times, it is important that you interrogate the idea of the text in question. In the attempt to sum up our reading of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, let us revisit the idea of a dramatic text. A text is anything that invites a reading, ranging from a book to an advertisement hoarding. It includes cinema and obviously a performance. In the context of theatre, you will come across the term 'playtext' or 'dramatic text', such as the one that we have been discussing. A dramatic text must be differentiated from the actual performance on stage which also is another text, the theatrical text. As students when you read a play, you must be conscious of this distinction, particularly the indirect relationship between the dramatic text and the actual performed theatrical text. You must note that two performances of the same dramatic text may end up being different from each other. So, while reading a dramatic text like Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, you must start getting into the habit of seeing the connection and the indirect relation between the playtext/dramatic text and the performance, which itself is another audio-visual text – a spectacle. In other words, when you read a play, you ought to 'stage' it in our head, remembering that the play has a real stage in mind from the perspective of the playwright. Otherwise, we may lose so much of what a play has to offer us if we read them privately, as if they were short stories or novels. It is also important to theoretically differentiate between two commonly used, inadvertently synonymous word: *drama* and *theatre*. Keir Elam in his book *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* offers to clear the air on this popular confusion. He defines drama as the element of fiction used by the playwright to script the play, comprising a story-framework, plot, characters, dialogues, stage directions etc. Theatre has been defined as the production of the drama in which the reception of

the audience is also involved. The table on the following page may be handy for a better understanding of the relationship between the two commonly misused terms:

DRAMA

DRAMATIC TEXT/PLAYTEXT AUTHORED BY THE PLAYWRIGHT

Scripted Plotline, Dialogue, Stage directions, Comments by the playwright

THEATRE

THEATRICAL TEXT/PERFORMANCE ON STAGE

SPECTACLE

Space Character dialogue action actor gesture

Music lighting special effects sound ....

Now you may revisit Dattani's *Tara* once again and identify the performance markers indicated by the playwright throughout the playtext, and note down how a theatre director may conceptualise the performance of this play on the stage, particularly the fusion between the different time frames used in the narration of the story.

4.14.12 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Examine critically all clues given in the stage directions and in the words spoken by the characters, silences, pauses and actions which help you visualise the performance of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.
2. Make short critical notes on the dramatic build-up to climaxes or sudden changes of direction or switches in mood within the framework of the essential conflict which makes the drama in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.
3. The establishment of characters and the relations and interactions between them is fundamental to the dramatist's purpose in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. Discuss.
4. Critically discuss the exposition (the opening scene) of *Tara.*
5. Critically discuss Dattani's indication of the levels of language (the 'registers' as they are sometimes called) on which *Tara* works to establish its meanings.
6. Critically comment on the technical skill of the playwright in selecting his material and bringing together items that should go together to establish meaning, or contrasting items to jolt audiences into awareness, in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.

7. How does Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* sustain or challenge established audience assumptions, views and beliefs? Discuss.
8. Discuss how Dattani's drama addresses stereotyped notions of gender, with special reference to *Tara*.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Comment on Dattani's use of the multi-level set in *Tara*.
2. Assess the role of Dr Thakkar in *Tara*.
3. What role does Roopa play in the shaping up of the identity of the Siamese twins in *Tara*?
4. How would you assess the effectiveness of the denouement of Dattani's play *Tara*?
5. Do you agree with the definition of 'text' given in this section? Give reasons.
6. Differentiate between a 'dramatic text' and a 'theatrical text' as well as between 'drama' and 'theatre.'

Short-answer Type Questions

1. How would you explain Chandan's objective behind the composition of a play in order to "masticate" memories in "my mind and spit out the result to the world, in anger"? Why is Chandan angry?
2. Explain the following observation of Chandan in the light of your understanding of Dattani's *Tara*: "Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash, with some unknown force."
3. Critically comment on the *anagnorisis* of Dattani's play *Tara*.

4.14.13 Suggested Readings

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Notes

Notes

Module - 5

Reading Indian English Short Story

Unit - 15 ❐ Indian English Short Story as a Genre

Structure

5.15.1 Objectives

This unit presents a history of the development of Indian English Short Story. As a genre, it flourished in some specific periods of the history of Indian English Literature, and therefore tracing the trajectory of this genre is a daunting task. However, in this unit, an attempt has been made to provide a history of the evolution of this genre taking into account both the minor and major literary productions. After reading this unit, you are expected to understand the changing patterns of the themes and the techniques used by the Indian English writers of short stories.

5.15.2 Introduction

In this unit, dear students, we shall try to understand the evolution of the genre of Indian English Short Story. This genre, unlike the genres of Indian English Poetry, Indian English Fiction and Indian English Drama, did not receive much attention and therefore it was not seriously considered by the eminent literary historians. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Indian Writing in English* (1985) and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra in his edited volume, *A History of Indian Literature in English* (2003) do not include any section/chapter on Indian English Short Story. Iyengar and Mehrotra offer, in their own unique manner, certain very significant perspectives on Indian English Poetry, Indian English Novel, Indian English Drama, Indian English Prose and Indian English Criticism. The absence

of any discussion on Indian English Short Story in their volumes indicates a lack of interest in this genre, foregrounding the fact that probably this genre has not come of age. Despite this lack of concern about the apparently less popular genre, M.K. Naik is the only critic who has made a serious attempt to explore the trajectory of Indian English Short Story. His edited anthology, *The Indian English Short Story* (1984) provides a comprehensive overview of the beginning and the rise of this genre, elucidating the various aspects of this particular breed of literature. B.S. Naikar, while reviewing Naik's anthology, considers it to be "quite objective in its choice of authors and stories" and he also feels that, Naik's "introduction offers a panoramic view of the entire realm of the Indian English short story" (*World Literature Today* 668). In fact, before the publication of this anthology, Naik included two separate sections on "The Short Story" – the first section focuses on the pre-independence scenario, the second one elucidates the development in this field during the post-independence era – in his 1982 published book, *A History of Indian English Literature. Hence*, as a literary historian, Naik is the first critic to seriously map the evolving trends of the genre of Indian English Short Story. This however does not imply that other critics did not make attempts to anthologise short stories written by Indian authors. In fact, there are numerous anthologies of this kind, and these are mostly compilations of short stories with no dedicated effort to offer any fresh perspective on this type of literature. Naik's 1984 anthology is unique because it seeks to introduce Indian English Short Story as a genre providing the necessary lens through which we can understand the growth and development of this genre.

5.15.3 The Beginning of Indian English Short Story: Western Influence or Indian Tradition?

Where can we locate the beginning of Indian English Short Story? This question is quite disturbing for the literary historians. The root of Indian English Short Story remains undefined till date. Naik begins his discussion on this genre by mentioning the Gandhian age when short story writers appeared on the literary scenario. These writers, as Naik notes, were mainly novelists, who also wrote short stories, "Like the novel, the Indian English short story too came into its own during the Gandhian age. The most notable contribution here is by the leading novelists, though there are also writers who devoted themselves exclusively to this form" (176). Thus, apart from the three major novelists cum short story writers of the Gandhian age, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, there were literary writers who utilised their creative energy in writing short stories only. These writers were keen on dealing with the various aspects of the rural life in India and they approached issues related to human life in a simple manner. Shankar

Ram, S. K. Chettur, K. S. Venkataramani, K. Nagarajan and Manjeri Isvaran are the prominent Indian English short story writers, and being contemporaries of Narayan, Anand and Rao, they sought to create a distinct space for Indian English Short Story during the Gandhian age. Though from the points of view of choice of theme and philosophical depth, Narayan, Anand and Rao are probably better short story writers than Shankar Ram, Chettur et al. there is no doubt a trace of strong undercurrent of conflict between the traditional indigenous form of story-telling and the modern form of English short story in the literary writings of these authors. As pioneers in this particular genre, these authors seem to struggle with the problem of negotiating with the two different traditions of stories: one is the indigenous form of story-telling and the other is the imported English model of short story. Hence, the actual beginning of this genre is, in a sense, complicated as the writers were anxious about the impact of these two different traditions on the literary form and theme of Indian English Short Story. In fact, while tracing the history of Indian English Short Story, C. V. Venugopal refers to the *Panchatantra* and the *Kathasaritsagara* which "make use of a frame story into which other stories are fitted. As each story is complete in itself, we may as well assume that these cycles present our first collection of short stories" (4). These ancient Indian tales are first instances of indigenous model of short story that influenced the literary writers in conceiving the basic structure of the short stories written in English. Even the ancient popular folk tales and the oral stories from the old Indian epics provided ample scope for identifying the ways through which these indigenous tales could be metamorphosed into a new form of literary writing (Venugopal 11). The early writers of Indian English short stories soaked in the spirit of these ancient fables attempted to create an idiom that reflected their strong attachment with the indigenous root of short story. However, the influence of Western writers also played a major role in shaping the contours of this new literary breed. H. E. Bates, Joseph Conrad, Guy de Maupassant, D. H. Lawrence and O. Henry are such short story writers whose influence on the Indian writers is undeniable. These Western writers along with many others appealed to the Indian writers as the Western model of short story narrative with a focus on precision, psychological complexity of the characters, humour, wit and intense human passion gained universal acceptance and popularity. These Western features seeped into the Indian breed of short story because most of the early short story writers were conversant with the characteristic features of Western short stories. Hence, in its initial stage of development, Indian English Short Story had to deal with the dual influences creating a deep sense of anxiety among the representative early writers of this genre. The indigenous short story model was liberal, overtly didactic, allegorical, imprecise and digressive, whereas, the Western model was known for its concise expression of human passion, covert didacticism often combined

with a sense of moral predicament, minimal characters, and good use of intellect and wit. Early Indian English writers sought to explore the means through which these two apparently distinct models of short stories may be merged to create a unique blend of Western and indigenous form. However, this process of blending was not easy and many writers in order to avoid complex handling of two forms followed any one of the two models. Nevertheless, writers like Anand, Narayan and Rao attempted to seek a fine fusion of these two distinct traditions in their respective short stories.

5.15.4 Pre-Independence Indian English Short Story: The Three Great Writers

Among the pre-independent short story writers, the first one to gain popularity is Shankar Ram. This being his pen-name, Shankar Ram's actual name is T. L. Natesan. Ram's short stories are reflective of his association with the "rustic life in Tamil Nadu" and his narratives are often "sentimental" combined with a high degree of "didacticism" (Naik 176-177). In his narratives, there is clear indication of the presence of the indigenous model of short story. Ram's anthology of short stories appeared in two volumes: *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933). A. S. P. Ayyar is another short story writer from South India whose visibility as a literary personality is conspicuous due to his reformist zeal. Ayyar, apart from being a short story writer, is also a playwright and novelist. His short stories, as Naik notes, are based on various ideas of "social reform", exclusively concerned with the women condition in India (177). However, like Ram, his stories too are "stridently didactic" (Naik 177). S. K. Chettur, K. S. Venkataramani and K. Nagarajan are three other writers who contributed to the field of short story during the pre-independent period. These writers, like Ram and Ayyar, represent the rustic life, creating narratives that are didactic and indicative of their imaginative strength (Naik 177-178). There is also a remarkable influence of Gandhian philosophy in the short stories written by them. Naik remarks that in Venkataramani's stories the "heroes are products of the Gandhian ferment" (178). Venkataramani's famous character, Jatadharan is modelled on Mahatma Gandhi's life, who leads a selfless life believing in the doctrines of the *Gita*.

Thus, these writers, who happen to be the initial contributors to the literary field of Indian English Short Story, are significant from the perspective of making serious efforts to prepare the foundation of a particular literary breed. Though lacking in necessary skills to improvise the indigenous model of short story, these writers obviously set a trend of writing that was naive and imaginative. The most notable writers of English

short stories during the pre-independence phase are: R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. These authors, who are novelists cum short story writers, gained immense popularity during the Gandhian era and this happened because of their serious attempts to develop an idiom of writing short story that appealed to the readers. As iconic writers, they have created unique models of short narratives which reflect a strong urge to invent new forms of representing characters and their actions. Narayan's short stories are remarkable pieces of character portrayals, exhibiting his tactful use of the comic elements. His stories are set in rural locations of South India, and in most of these narratives, the emphasis is on the play of different thoughts in the human mind. Narayan's characters are interesting from the perspectives of the social and the psychological dimensions. His reputation as a short story writer mainly rests on the collection, *Malgudi Days* (1943). Many stories from this collection have been dramatised for presentation in the form of television serials, and for the readers/viewers Malgudi has acquired a symbolic idea of colonial India. In his assessment of Narayan's short stories, A. N. Dwivedi remarks, "he reveals his situations on characters by means of narration and not by means of dialogue. His cool-headed detachment is discernible almost in every story ... One of the typical features of his technique is that he does not bother to evolve an indigenous brand of English in order to cope with the local atmosphere or the social milieu. The sustaining power of a Narayan story is its unmixed comic sense and its pure delight in the art of living" (qtd. in Verma 4). Narayan's contemporary, Mulk Raj Anand is also well known for his short stories. Anand's stories are mostly set in the rural spaces and his characters usually belong to the underprivileged section of the society. There is a strong note of reformist zeal in Anand's prose as he seeks to address various kinds of crisis experienced by the oppressed people. With an undertone of satire, Anand's representation of the oppressed people exhibits his criticism of the government's failure to attain social equilibrium. Among Anand's famous short story collections, *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) is significant because it presents a character named, Lajwanti who is brutally tortured by her in-laws. Through Lajwanti's suffering, Anand satirises the oppressive patriarchal society responsible for suppressing the voice of women. His short stories, as A. N. Dwivedi remarks, are conspicuous because of the aspects of "humanism" and "robust satire" (qtd. in Verma 2). Dwivedi further states that, "Anand takes to satire to hit at the rotten and inhuman social customs and conditions – the proud parents, the child marriage, the stubbornness of the elders, hypocrisy, insanitation, and cruelty in education, and so many other things" (qtd. in Verma 3). Unlike Narayan and Anand, Raja Rao is not a prolific short story writer. In his narratives, Rao uses philosophic perspectives to address apparently simple social issues from a complex viewpoint. He often takes recourse to metaphysics

while dealing with incidents containing complex meanings. Naik cites two short stories of Rao, "India: A Fable" and "The Policeman and the Rose", to exemplify the depth of his philosophical interpretation (184). In the former short story, Rao depicts the encounter of a young narrator with a French boy, and the specific references to different places, animals and persons in their conversation are suggestive of the "author's evaluation of the relative spiritual development of the two societies" (Naik 185). The latter short story cited by Naik is loaded with deep symbolic overtones. The 'policeman' is representative of the "*ahamkara (ego-sense)" and* the 'red rose' is symbolic of the "Rajo-guna, the passions of the mind" (Naik 185). Thus, Rao's short stories are generically different from those of Narayan and Anand; incorporating a philosophical dimension these stories go beyond the realm of social moorings to explore ways through which human and cultural psychology can be analysed. Apart from Narayan, Anand and Rao, another prominent short story writer during the pre-independence era is Manjeri S. Isvaran. With ten volumes of published short stories, Isvaran's reputation as a writer is based on his conscious attempt to contextualise the narrative modes of ancient Indian fables and oral tales in his prose narratives. In many stories, Isvaran deals with such themes that are reminiscent of old Indian fables and folk tales. However, there is a strange balance between tradition and modernity in Isvaran's short narratives. While assessing Isvaran's stories, N. Gopalakrishnan Nair argues, "The genesis of Isvaran's faculty of harmonizing the cultural and religious tradition with modernity in his short fiction can be traced" (58) and he further states that, "in the most characteristic manner of Chekhov, Isvaran concentrates on details of appearance, and a brief touch of fantasy" (45). Thus, Isvaran's technique of writing explicitly foregrounds a unique amalgamation of the old Indian story telling method with the modern mode of structuring narratives. It is due to this capacity of blending that Isvaran's reputation as a short story writer is indelible. Apart from this remarkable aspect, Isvaran is also quite sensitive to the issues concerning the condition of women in the society. The themes of quite a large number of his stories are based on the women belonging to various class, caste and religion. Pooja Verma notes this aspect in Isvaran's short fiction and states, "But of all the subjects, Isvaran seems to excel in the sympathetic revelation of female psyche, ranging from a housewife to a school going girl, a mother-in-law to a daughter-in-law, from a young widow to a granny" (6). In stories titled, "Crutches", "No anklet bells for her" and "Sympathy" there is ample evidence of Isvaran's deep sympathy for the oppressed females.

Activities

1. Read few stories written by Narayan, Anand and Rao. Try to trace the differences in their themes and styles of writing.
2. Do you find traces of the Panchatantra or the Jataka tales in the stories written by the early authors? Prepare a list of these elements that you find in these stories.

5.15.5 Post-Independence Indian English Short Story: Issues and Perspectives

The post-independence scenario in the field of Indian English Short Story witnessed a big change as many famous novelists endeavoured to write short stories. Setting aside the mental anxiety of the early short story writers, the short story writers in the post-independence era sought to innovate themes and techniques in their stories. Among a host of short story writers who flourished during this period, the focus in this unit will be on a few representative authors whose contribution to the field is immense. The first significant author who created a big impact on the minds of the readers during 1950s and 1960s is, Khushwant Singh. Singh began his career as writer of short stories, and then he started writing novels. His stories are highly satiric and humourous, revealing the author's criticism of Indian democracy, politics, governance, bureaucracy and social norms. Marked for the use of irony, Singh's short fiction exhibits his uncompromising attitude and his experience of working as a bureaucrat in India and abroad provided him the necessary inputs for exposing the loopholes in the administrative functioning. The story titled, "The Voice of God" strongly criticises the functioning of Indian democracy and the inherent corruption in the election procedure. C. V. Venugopal comments on Singh's use satire and humour in this story, "Khushwant Singh digs at the very illiterate and vulnerable masses of India in his 'Voice of God'. Indeed, almost every aspect of the Indian's social life, in its welcome as well as unwelcome features has been touched with mild satire or humour..." (122). The next author of short stories, who gained popularity after Singh is Ruskin Bond. In the 1960s and 1970s, Bond's stories introduced themes exploring the bonding of humans and nature. With an autobiographical perspective, his stories evoke "a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood" (Naik 250). "The Day Grandfather Tickled a Tiger", "The Room on the Roof", "Time Stops at Shamli", "A Handful of Nuts", "The Cherry Tree", "My Father's Trees" and "The Meeting Pool" are instances of such stories in which Bond's childhood experiences have been fictionalised. These and many other stories foreground his strong bonding with nature.

Naik believes that Bond's "genuine feeling for the natural world" has "somewhat of a Wordsworthian quality about it" (250). Bond's contemporary and another popular author of short stories is Manohar Malgonkar. Malgonkar authored three volumes of short stories, *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975) and *Rumble-Tumble* (1977). Due to his association with the Indian army during the Second World War and being a civil servant, Malgonkar attempted to write narratives based on his work experiences. His stories are generally fictional accounts of the lived experiences of Marathi people, expressing the various means through which they have negotiated with the colonial and post-colonial government. Though his stories are culture-specific, they often address issues of national concern. With wide ranging themes of communal unrest (explicated in the story "Four Graves"), plight of the farmers in modern India (represented in the stories "Two Red Roosters" and "Tractor and the Corn Goddess"), impact of war on common people (narrated in the stories "Bombay Beware", "Rumble-Tumble" and "Bachcha Lieutenant"), and such other themes of social and political relevance, Malgonkar is a talented author whose personal experiences have been so well translated into good stories. However, in spite of achieving success as a good story teller, Malgonkar is considered to be lacking in creating an art of story-telling: "Malgonkar's short stories also prove that an exceptionally varied experience of life does not make for major art, if a writer consistently approaches experience obstinately wearing emotional and intellectual blinkers" (Naik 249).

Manoj Das is another prolific short story writer who began his career in late 1960s. With several published anthologies of short stories and winner of Sahitya Akademi award for his contribution to Oriya literature, Das's short stories have generated a lot critical interest among researchers and academics. He has successfully represented the various colours of Oriya rustic life in his stories. Graham Greene extols Das's achievement by stating, "Manoj Das ... will take a place on my shelves beside the stories of Narayan" (qtd. in Krishnaji 48). In fact, like Narayan, Das too loves to deal with the various shades of rural life in India. Short stories titled, "The Tree", "The Crocodile's Lady", "The Cat" and "The Submerged Valley" are instances of such stories in which Das represents the intimate association of Oriya rural people with nature. However, in all the stories of Das and especially in "The Mystery of the Missing Cap" there is a strong undercurrent of satire and humour. Often he is found to be satirising the superstitious beliefs and prejudices of the rustic people.

Among the important female short story writers in the post-independence era, the one who deserves to be mentioned is Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Like Bond and Das, Jhabvala too started writing from the late 1960s and she published eight volumes of short stories.

Born in a German Jewish family, Jhabvala had to flee from Germany to England during the time when the Nazis tortured the Jews, and later in her life she married a Parsi Indian architect. She came to India in 1951 and since then she has been writing stories about her past, her encounter with India and her place in India. There is strong note of feminist perspective in her writings which is often linked to her ideas of cultural conflicts. Writing from a space of liminality, Jhabvala's short narratives offer interesting perspectives on cultural encounters vis-a-vis women's experiences. In stories like, "The Sixth Child", "The Old Lady", "The First Marriage" and "The Widow", she mainly deals with the issue of marginalisation of women in India, seeking to explore the psyche of female characters. However, one particular short story which is especially mentioned by critics is "An Experience of India". This story shows how white women look at India and how they interact with Indian women and their cultural outlook. Apart from Jhabvala, a host of female writers emerged in the field of Indian English Short Story in 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Most of these writers address specific aspects related to the lived experiences of women located in different parts of India. Alienation, marginalisation, exploration of female psyche, female body and identity, domestic violence and suppression of female voice are some of the dominant themes in the stories written by these female writers. Anita Desai, Sajatha Bala Subramanian, Kamala Das, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande are some of the prominent short story writers who sought to widen the domain of this literary breed by including a variety of stories that are women-centric. However, one particular theme that assumed special significance in the area of short stories during late 1980s and 1990s is diasporic sensibility. Along with many women writers, male writers also narrativised stories of migration, exile, loss of home space and cultural alienation to develop themes associated with diaspora. This theme became quite prominent in many short stories written in the last decade of twentieth century as many authors migrated to the West and represented their exilic experience through their short narratives. Before initiating a discussion on this theme in the next section, we must keep in mind that the domain of Indian English Short Story widened in 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and this was possible mainly because of the efforts of a series of writers who explored innovative ways of telling stories, dealt with new themes and presented new kinds of fictional characters. Keki N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Jag Suraiya, Farrukh Dhondy and Amit Chaudhuri are some of the representative short story writers who made sincere efforts to offer new themes and techniques of story-telling. Daruwalla's short stories depict iconoclastic characters interested in redefining their selves and conventional norms. His fictional characters often travel abroad. As an author Daruwalla also dives into the past to examine certain aspects related to our nation's heritage. "The Minister for Permanent Unrest",

"Love Across the Salt Desert", "When Gandhi Came to Gorakhpur" and "Of Abul Qasim" are intense pieces of individual tales involving travels of various kinds. Shiv K. Kumar, though known for his excellent poems, is also a good short story writer. In his two volumes of short stories, *Beyond Love and Other Stories* (1980) and *To Nun with Love and Other Stories* (2001), Kumar portrays a variety of characters and settings, with intermittent references to human psychology. This phenomenon, as Pooja Verma observes, renders uniqueness to Kumar's prose, "The scene shifts from India to Bangla Desh and also to the U.S.A., and the characters range from a flirtatious husband to a Sanyasi, a soldier to a clergyman and a constant wife to a nun. Short, slick and readable, the stories are, however, thin in content. Only occasionally, a story like "Beyond Love" stands out by its psychological interest" (11-12). Jug Suraiya's single anthology of short stories, *Chap Called Peter Pan and Other Stories* (1991) needs special mention because of his use of journalistic writing in narrating tales of a different kind. Known for his travel writing documents and also working as an Associate Editor in *The Times of India*, Suraiya's short fiction represents characters dealing with various crises. Verma notes this aspect in his stories and states, "It is a pleasant surprise to find him an accomplished short story writer as well. His best stories are those in which a character is caught in a crisis and is shown reacting to the situation" (11). Farrukh Dhondy's Parsi background plays a major role in shaping his sensibility as a writer. In the short story anthology, *Poona Company* (1980), Dhondy narrativises his childhood experiences of growing up in a Parsi community through a set of stories that are nostalgic and expressive in terms of his ethnic identity. However, in the volume titled, *Come to Mecca* (1978), Dhondy fictionalises his immigrant experience during his stay in Britain, concentrating primarily on the themes of race, diaspora and ethnicity. Natasha Soobramanien appreciates Dhondy's perspective in *Come to Mecca* by stating, "Dhondy had drawn on his experience of immigrant communities for his savagely comic and angry stories of young first- and second-generation Britons exploring their conflicted sense of racial identity" ("Book of a Lifetime: Come to Mecca, By Farrukh Dhondy"<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/book-of-a-lifetime-come-to-mecca-by-farrukh-dhondy-8216912.html>. Amit Chaudhuri's stint as a short story writer is less illustrious than his achievement in the genre of Indian English Novels. In his twin volumes of short story, *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) and *Real Time: Stories and a Reminiscence* (2002) are suggestive of his ability to experiment with the art of story-telling. In the first volume, Calcutta assumes an imaginative dimension in the minds of various characters dislocated from this city, and this phenomenon transforms the city into a character interacting with the diasporic subjects. The set of nine stories in this collection acquire a unique fluidity discarding the conventional notions

of beginning and closure, exhibiting Chaudhuri's innovate method of connecting narratives with Calcutta's topography. Chaudhuri's second volume exemplifies his conscious desire to create new forms of story-telling, though the earlier theme of diaspora again reappears in this collection. This volume seeks to connect two Indian cities, Calcutta and Bombay, with the diasporic characters in the stories, elaborating Chaudhuri's brilliant portrayal of characters and places. Nalini Jain in her book review article praises Chaudhuri's experimental mode of story-telling, "Chaudhuri displays extraordinary skill as a short story writer – a very difficult form indeed ... fluid, limpid ... subtle" (qtd. in Chaudhuri, Kindle Location 69).

So, a cursory glance at the list of the authors discussed in the above sections reveals the course of the development of the genre of Indian English Short Story. Since the beginning when an unusual kind of anxiety was pervasive in the writings of early authors, Indian English Short Story matured mainly due to the contributions of writers like, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Majeri Isvaran. They were mainly instrumental in attracting the interest of the readers to this upcoming breed of literature. In the post-independence scenario, a galaxy of authors wrote numerous short stories with a serious focus on exploring new modes of story-telling and developing innovative themes. Indeed, this broadened the domain of this genre and by the end of twentieth century and beginning of this century, Indian English Short Story matured to claim a considerable space in the history of Indian English literature. This fact may be quite comforting for the lovers of Indian English short stories, but we must acquaint ourselves with the contemporary development in this field before settling with the view that Indian English Short Story is a flourishing genre. The next section, therefore, will address certain very important issues that gained prominence in this genre during the contemporary period, and in doing so, it shall also provide an analysis of the present condition of this literary breed.

Activities

1. Apart from the post-independence authors discussed in this section, there are other writers who are also important. Prepare a list of these authors and their works. Find the significant features in their short stories.
2. Read a few stories written by Ruskin Bond. What are the dominant features in these stories?
3. Read the stories authored by Amit Chaudhuri. Try to find the innovative techniques used by him in these stories.

5.15.6 Post-Independence Indian English Short Story: Diasporic Sensibility and Other Perspectives

In the previous section, we discussed the presence of the theme of diaspora in the short stories written by the authors in late 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of the present century. This theme gained immense popularity during the post-liberalisation era due to an increase in transnational migration of workforce. Many authors, born in India, chose to settle in developed nations and writing from the diaspora space evidently gave them an opportunity to explore their state of dislocation by inventing stories connected with their real feelings of loss and displacement. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness* (1985), Uma Parameswaran's *What Was Always Hers* (1999) and *Riding High with Krishna and a Baseball Bat and Other Stories* (2006) are good examples of short story anthologies that concentrate on various aspects of diaspora. While Lahiri's stories narrate the experiences of the Indian immigrants in America, Mukherjee's and Parameswaran's stories focus on the socio-cultural experiences of the Indian immigrants in Canada. For her deft handling of the various nuances of diasporic life in her fictionalized narratives, Lahiri received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for her work, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Parameswaran also received big recognition in the form of two awards: New Muse Award in 1999, and Jubilee Award in 2000, for her work, *What Was Always Hers*. Recognitions and awards like these inspired the authors of that generation to write stories. Indeed, the first two decades of this century has witnessed a big rise in the productions of short story volumes. Contemporary writers have not only used the theme of diaspora, but also have taken necessary initiatives in introducing new themes and modes of story-telling. Namita Gokhale's very popular short story volume, *The Habit of Love* (2012) presents fictional accounts of various female characters with an intention of depicting the complex psyche of contemporary women. The lived experience of Indian gay men in the United States asserting their gender identity has been beautifully fictionalised in the short story collection, *Quarantine* (2010) by Rahul Mehta. Recalling the era of Mughal empire in India, Madhulika Liddle creates the fictional characters of Muzaffar Jang in her work, *The Eighth Guest and Other Muzaffar Jang Mysteries* (2015) weaving mysterious stories that include adventure and suspense along with generating a renewed interest in colonial history. Ayan Pal's *Chronicles of Urban Nomads* (2014) and *21 Tales to Tell* (2014) are very well-received short story collections, focusing on the dynamics of changing urban life. Apart from these authors, there are writers who have written stories but most of these have appeared in online and print journals, newspapers and magazines. These stories available in scattered

forms along with the published volumes of short stories indicate a promising future for this genre. Despite the immense popularity of Indian English Fiction in the last few decades, overshadowing the growth of other genres, Indian English Short Story has been able to retain its appeal to the readers. With new themes and experimental techniques of story-telling, this genre in the contemporary scenario is gradually evolving and attuning to the demands of the reading public. This is quite evident if we consider the variety of themes dealt with by the authors mentioned above. Nevertheless, the challenge is big and the contemporary short story writers are exploring new avenues of making this genre more popular and acceptable.

Activities

1. Prepare a list of the major themes that emerged in the genre of Indian English Short Story in the contemporary period. Can you find other such traits that became important in this literary domain during this period?
2. Apart from the short story writers mentioned this section, there are other writers who have made significant contribution to the field. Prepare a list of these writers and also note the major themes in their stories.

5.15.7 Summing Up

We have mapped the trajectory of Indian English Short Story through a thorough discussion on the objectives of the eminent writers and the evolving themes in their stories. Due to the absence of any neat historical outline, it is really difficult to trace the evolving trends of this particular literary breed. However, if we carefully consider the development of this genre concentrating on the use of themes and narrative techniques, we may notice the pattern of growth of this literary domain. This development can be traced in the discussions on various authors in the above sections. Now, despite the dominant influence of Indian English Fiction, the contemporary scenario is rich in terms of thematic variations and innovative modes of story-telling. Many renowned poets, novelists, playwrights and critics are writing short stories that seek to explore the possibilities of enriching this genre with a conscious attempt to develop the art of story-telling. Of late, published short story anthologies are rarely found as the publishing industry is keen on presenting fictions, anthologies of plays and poetry in the literary market. This may create a sense of crisis in the field of Indian English Short Story, but the imminent crisis can be tackled through certain initiatives. In this context, we may refer to Shiv K. Kumar's compilation of short stories, *Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English* published in 1991. In the introduction of this book, Kumar states that in spite of maintaining a "low profile" in the

early period of its development, Indian English Short Stories "emerged as a popular literary genre in the mid-eighties" mainly because of the initiatives taken by the central government in telecasting the short stories of R.K. Narayan through the Doordarshan channel (8). We are all conversant with the television serial, "Malgudi Days" which is a dramatised version of Narayan's short stories bearing the same title. Kumar refers to the television serials, "Malgudi Days", "Ek Kahani" and "Katha Sagar" that were based on the dramatised versions of different short story volumes, and these serials gained huge popularity during 1980s and 1990s (8). Apart from this initiative, Kumar informs that the Indira Gandhi National University "launched a course in creative writing with an emphasis on the short story" (8). These efforts are commended by Kumar and he believes that in future such drives will certainly ensure the popularity of this genre. Indeed, it is high time when similar such initiatives must be taken either by the government or government sponsored institutes in creating a renewed interest in this apparently neglected field of literature.

5.15.8 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Discuss the major features of Indian English Short Story during the pre-independence era.
2. Write a critical note on the contribution of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao to the field of Indian English Short Story.
3. How did the genre of Indian English Short Story evolve during the post-independence period. Discuss with suitable references to the prominent short story writers.
4. Comment on the major themes and techniques used by the women short story writers in the post-independence era.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Explain how the theme of diaspora influenced the short story authors of 1980s and 1990s.

   Discuss with appropriate references to certain important texts.
2. Comment on the emerging trends in Indian English Short Story during the last two decades of this century.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Discuss briefly the distinctive features of the short stories written by Ruskin Bond.
2. Why is Ruth Prawer Jhabvala important as a short story writer?

5.15.9 Suggested Readings

Chaudhuri, Amit. *Real Time: Stories and a Reminiscence*. London: Penguin, 2013. Kindle Edition.

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Unit - 16 ❐ Raja Rao – “India – A Fable”

Structure

5.16.1 Objectives

In this unit, a critical discussion on Raja Rao’s short story, “India: A Fable” has been provided. The learners are expected to understand the thematic significance of this story and the philosophical ideas that motivated Rao to write this literary piece. A thorough reading of this unit will enable the students to grasp Rao’s art of story-telling.

5.16.2 Introduction

Raja Rao, as you have noted earlier, is one of the ‘triumvirate’ of Indian English fiction writers. Your syllabus includes a short fiction “India – a Fable” which will be discussed in this unit. It is a story with layers of meaning in it. Writing from abroad, Rao fuses Indian philosophical ideas into the very texture of the story. We shall try to discuss these aspects one by one in the following sections. We also need to have some ideas about Raja Rao the man and the author. His cultural and ideological location should also be discussed to contextualise the story in your syllabus.

5.16.3 Raja Rao : Life and Works

Raja Rao was born in Mysore on 8th November, 1908. He, along with R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, played a significant role in upgrading the novel in Indian Writing in English. Being born into a family of learned Brahmins, he had been introduced to

Indian philosophy and Sanskrit since childhood. After graduating from Nizam College in Hyderabad, he won the Asiatic Society Scholarship for pursuing higher studies at the University of Montpellier in France. There he researched on the topic of Indian influence on Irish literature. Rao spent the larger part of his adult life in the West. Although his literary perspectives were deeply influenced by the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valerie and Romain Rolland, his fictional art is deep-rooted in the Indian soil. His first novel *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. His next novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964. Other major works by him include *The Cat and the Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988). His oeuvre also includes shorter fiction such as *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947), *The Policeman and the Rose: Stories* (1978) and *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989). His significant works in non-fiction are *The Meaning of India* (1996), a collection of essays, and *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998), a biography. For his extraordinary contribution to literature, he has received several prestigious awards such as Padma Bhusan in 1969 and Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1988.

He moved to the United States of America in 1966 and taught Indian philosophy at the University of Texas till 1980. Rao had joined the Quit India movement in 1942. He was deeply influenced by Shankracharya's philosophic principles of *Advaitya* (non-duality) and Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). His fictional works are but literary vehicles which represent his search for the truth through a philosophical introspection of the social and political realities. His quest for truth led to his desperate longing for a guru or mentor, which ended in 1943 when he met Sri Atmananda (1883-1959) in Trivandrum. His semi-autobiographical novel *The Serpent and the Rope* represents his search for the guru. *Kanthapura* deals with the influence of the Gandhian principles in the nationalist struggle taking place in a remote village of south India. Rao died in 2006 and was posthumously awarded Padma Vibhusan, the second highest civilian award of India, in 2007.

5.16.4 Raja Rao as a Writer of Indian Fiction in English

"The most important thing for an Indian English novelist is to have his roots deep in Indian soil" (Sharma K. 4). The 'novel' as a literary genre had evolved in Europe in the eighteenth century. The advent of 'novel' in India and the gradual emergence of Indian novel in English were consequences of the colonial encounter. In the early decades of the twentieth century when Indian Writing in English was developing, many critics had

raised the question if it was really possible for the Indian writers to represent the Indian thought and culture/s in a language that belonged to the colonisers. Addressing this contemporary critical query in his "Foreword" to *Kanthapura* Raja Rao observes that "[t]he tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs" (5). By introducing certain stylistic and linguistic devices such as Indian words, mythological sub-texts and philosophical ideas in his fictional narratives, he attempted to infuse the tempo of Indian life in his English expression. The mode of narration in *Kanthapura,* is that of the (*sthala)purana,* which is typically an indigenous form of narrating oral history and mythological tales. He uses this narrative mode for describing the anti-colonial struggle of a group of people in Kanthapura, a remote village in South India. As a postcolonial writer, Rao has tried to interrupt the colonial discourse in 'novel' with Indian perspectives, which included interweaving of indigenous narrative techniques and articulation of Gandhism and Vedantic philosophy.

Rao's philosophical perspectives are based on the precepts of guru-disciple relationship manifested in one's search for the guru (mentor), principles of the Absolute or *Brahma* in *Advaitism* (non-duality) preached by Sri Shankaracharya (788-820) and the archetype of *shiva-shakti* (masculine-feminine) represented in Tantric discourse. There is a quest for Absolute truth among his protagonists and the guru plays a very significant role in that pursuit. In his semi-autobiographical novel *The Serpent and the Rope,* we come across the author's own desperation to find out the guru. This he represents through the anxieties of Ramaswamy, the protagonist. The philosophical principles offer a metaphysical dimension to his fiction, which can be observed in his novels as well as in his short stories such as "Akkayya," "The Policeman and the Rose," "Nimka," "India: A Fable" and "On the Ganga Ghat." For example, in "The Policeman and the Rose," *ahankar* or ego has been metaphorically addressed as "the Policeman" who arrests our soul and prevents us from achieving supreme happiness and *moksha* (liberty). 'Rose' signifies spiritual pursuit or quest for the absolute truth. Stories such as "The Cow of the Barricades" and "Javni" reveal his penchant for symbols which elucidate the principles of Hinduism. Cow is considered to be a holy animal among the Hindus and in "Indian mythology, the cow is the most revered of all animals" (Sharma, R. L. 159). In "The Cow of the Barricades" Gauri, the 'cow,' has been represented as a symbol of the nation or motherland. "She is a veritable goddess, heroic in her moves characterized by a strong inner drive and strength that magnify her role from an ordinary cow to a hero" (Sharma, R. L. 159). Similarly, references to the Ganges in "On the Ganga Ghat" are permeated with spiritual symbolism. "In these stories Raja Rao explores the play of life as it unfolds in Benaras, the holy city

to die in" (Vyaghreswarudu 193). Rao personifies Ganga as the "I" or the inner self. In the last story, he observes that instead of flowing, Ganga has become standstill, which is but a symbolical representation of the "flux through which one identifies and comprehends illusion and reality, truth and untruth" (Sharma, R.L. 158).

Rao represents the Indian nation and the Indian nationalism in his fiction through symbols and archetypes that are found in the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata,* the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. In spite of being an expatriate for the larger part of his life, his nostalgic ruminations about his homeland are strongly constituted by his knowledge of the Indian mythology and Vedantic principles. He connects the mythical past with the present by representing and critiquing the contemporary social issues in his fiction. In stories such as "The Little Gram Shop," "Javni" and "In Khandesh" he has dealt with social issues such as corruption, exploitation of women, selfishness of the feudal society, caste hierarchy and discrimination. Rao's fiction is rooted in the ground reality of both pre-Independence and post-Independence India. All these characteristics and facts reveal his commitment to establish Indian fiction in English as what Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has called a 'distinctive genre' (Jhabvala qtd. in Mercanti 62).

Activities

1. Prepare a list of Raja Rao's short stories. Choose any two stories (other than "India: A Fable") and go through them. Express within 150 words the thematic content of each story.
2. Write short notes on the concepts of *Advaita* and *Vedanta*.
3. Look up the following words and phrases in a dictionary of literary terms: mythology, motif, symbol, myth, archetype, oral history, expatriate literature.
4. Consider how Raja Rao has established himself as an Indian English writer.

5.16.5 "India: A Fable": Summary

This short story is set in Luxembourg, France. The author has come to a park on a spring day. There, he met Pierrot, a French child of five or six years. Two years back, his mother had died in childbirth. His father, a colonel, was away on an official tour in Morocco. He had come to the park with his young nanny. While the latter, addressed as Jeannot/ Jeanne in the story, busied herself in lovemaking with a young man, the child was left to the care of the author for some time. During this short span, the story was narrated in the form of an interaction between the author and the child. He imagined that he was in the desert of Arabia. Likewise, he was dragging his (wooden) camel to the oasis. On being

asked by the author, he could say that Arabia was a place with lot of sand and that there lived a prince who rode a golden horse. According to him the camel was a friend of the princess and it accompanied her when she went to meet the prince. However, he made it clear that the camel he was dragging along belonged to him. Its name was Kiki. He considered himself to be Prince Rudolfe, who was married to Princess Katherine. Kiki was brought from Ethiopia and was given to Princess Katherine as wedding present by the King of Arabia. When he came to know that the meaning of the author's name (Raja) was 'prince' he readily took him to be the prince of India. In reply to his enquiry "Where is India?" (162), the author introduced the Indian nation to him in the form of a metaphysical narrative. In stark contrast to the Arabian landscape, the topography of India consisted of forests, rivers, elephants, big moon, goddesses and the Ganges. The author described to the boy the occasion of his grand wedding with the goddesses, who wore crowns on their heads and rode elephants. Gradually, Pierrot became fascinated by the cultural variety in the narrative on India. He threw away Kiki into the pool in the park and said that "You like the oasis and there you are" (164). Now, he made himself busy with an elephant, whom he addressed as Titi. It was not a real elephant but an object of his imagination. He was also able to visualise in his imagination the entire Indian nation about which he had heard from the author. When his nanny came back to take him home, he did not want to leave the author. After that day, the author came to the park regularly in search of Pierrot. They met almost after a month. He was accompanied by a middle-aged woman—his new nanny. He ran into the author's arms and showed him the faces on the buttons of his favourite navy suit. The boy said that he had become a Maharaja. He also said that he rode an elephant and that the wedding was over.

5.16.6 Critical Understanding of the Text

Before he met the child, Rao reflected all alone on the resplendence of the spring season and felt that "[n]ever was Luxembourg so beautiful as on that fragile spring day" (159). It was not only the nature that looked regenerated after the dull winter but also the people, who had come outdoors to revive their spirits in the pleasant sunshine encompassing the lushness. People of different age groups were enjoying the bliss of the season in their own ways:

> Men came out, old men with coughs and whiskers, and sat by the ponds reading newspapers. The old, fat women removed their kerchiefs and spoke garrulous words. The Sorbonnard girls opened their blouses to let the cool air breathe down them, single silver bangles on their wrists, and cigarettes held lighted in the air. They … read d' Alembert or Henri Becque…. (159)

In the given extract, we get a glimpse of the French society from the perspective of Rao, an expatriate. His keenness to observe the history of the hostland becomes apparent when he sits under the statue of Anne of Austria, the Spanish princess of the House of Habsburg, who was married to King Louis XIII of France. Their marriage was more of a political truce between the two nations than the union of souls sought in marriage. Although she had been a queen, a public figure of royal authority, her personal life was one of linguishment in love. She had died of breast cancer. Her statue representing her magnanimous form—"grey, big-headed, big-bosomed" (159)—was ironical in the sense that it reflected "some old tragic royalty bulging with posthumous importance" (159). The sculpture of this historical figure invoked in his mind an array of grave thoughts which included "morganatic marriages, U.N. statistics, parks and books, and the *chocolat chez Alsecia rue d'Assas*" (159). The phrase "morganatic marriages" refers to a kind of marriage in which the spouse belonging to lower social status and his/her children could not claim the property of the spouse belonging to higher rank. Although Queen Anne's marriage was not an unequal alliance, it had had certain terms and conditions attached to it. According to these, if she would remain a childless widow, she would return to Spain with her dowry, jewels, wardrobe and pre-marital property rights. In order to retain her pre-marital rights, she had agreed to the bond prior to her marriage that she and her children would have no claim on the estate of King Louis XIII. In a broader sense, "morganatic marriages" may be interpreted as negotiations which lack warmth and mutual understanding.

Keeping in mind the fact that Rao's collections of short stories was published in 1947 and in 1978, we can relate between his references to "morganatic marriages, U.N. statistics, parks and books" (159) and the contemporary socio-political conditions in India and the world. The treaties that were signed during the Second World War, Indian Independence, Vietnam War, Indo-Chinese Wars and Indo-Pakistan Wars were similar to the morganatic marriages. U.N. or United Nations Organisation's data about the deaths and destruction caused in the wars and the incidents of communal violence seemed to ridicule the so-called peace treaties or truces among the nations. To Rao, a philosophical writer in exile (a person living in a foreign land for a considerable length of time), cultural differences, which stimulate animosity among people belonging to different nations, religions and races, is a crisis as well as a concern. Books symbolise knowledge. The park where the action of the story takes place represents an open space where people come to relax and relish the warmth of nature. Nature as it has been represented in the author's description of the spring day in Luxembourg, symbolises the harmony in the universe. Encompassing within its magnanimity the traits of benignity and unanimity, the universe seems to challenge the limited scope of worldly knowledge that divides people and makes them war-mongers.

In order to achieve supreme knowledge, which is like gauging the expanse of the universe, one needs to acquire a child's curiosity. One also needs to have complete faith on the guru. Pierrot's interaction with the author can be viewed as a pedagogical discourse in which the guru imparts supreme knowledge to the disciple. In this respect, this short story represents two important thematic characteristics of Rao's fiction: first, the theme of quest for the absolute truth. Secondly, the guru-disciple dialogue, which caters to the fructification of the first theme. Pierrot seems to have been deeply influenced by the tales of *The Arabian Nights,* in which he has heard about the details of the oriental world of the Middle East. As a result of this, he seems to be obsessed with certain aspects of Arabian landscape and social reality such as the desert, the sand, the camel, the oasis, gorgeous weddings etc. Earlier, we have seen that Rao makes significant observations on the adult world in the park but he could not start a dialogue with them. They seemed to be engrossed in their own world without realising the fact that the borderless universe encompassed them in that bower. With Pierrot's entry into the scene, a dialogue begins between the West and the East, which continues as a symbolic discourse dealing with the aforesaid themes of Rao's fiction.

To a child, imagination is more real than the reality. On being asked where he was going, Pierrot tells the author that he was going to Arabia. He was taking Kiki, his (wooden) camel to the oasis. To him, the pool in the park at Luxembourg was a replication of 'oasis,' a water body located in the cultural geography of a desert. With his ability to fantasise, he broods on the royal weddings that take place in Arabia, which seems to represents the cultural space of the Oriental world in this story. From the postcolonial point of view, the trend of representing the Oriental world as a cultural space of merriment and extravaganza is nothing but a stereotyped notion nurtured by most of the intellectuals belonging to the Occidental world. According to Pierrot, weddings are extravagant occasions in which the prince and the princess kiss each other and then they say "adieu" (goodbye). On one hand, his view represents his immaturity, on the other hand, it reveals in general, our shallow knowledge about marriage, which is a ritual as well as a symbol for union. Rao focuses on the idea of union of souls in marriage and contrasts it with the physical union in heterosexual relationship, which he represents through Jeannot's lovemaking with a young man.

When Pierrot comes to know that the author's name is Raja and he is the prince of India, he tries to look at the Indian nation through the kaleidoscope of Arabian folklore. Rao enacting the symbolic role of the guru in this story, tries to modify his one-dimensional

view by providing him a glimpse of the cultural variety that constitutes the oriental world. Their interaction underlines the apparent contrast in the topographical details of the two countries—Arabia and India. Instead of sand, oasis and camel there are forests, rivers and elephants in India. One has to travel for fifteen nights and days on a steamer to reach India. The journey is described through the lunar imagery of new moon and full moon. When the moon is visible in the countries of the East, then, it is absent in the countries of the West and the vice-versa. Astronomical phenomena such as the day and the night, the new moon and the full moon connect symbolically the East with the West. These diurnal and nocturnal images are in consonance with the principle of universal oneness propounded in *Advaitism,* the branch of *Vedanta* philosophy by which Rao was influenced.

He makes an effort to 'decolonise' the narration of the Indian nation through mythic and symbolic interpretations. In reply to Pierrot's enquiry if he had a princess, Rao tells the little boy that he had two goddesses instead of princesses. He describes the goddesses as "ladies with four arms and a golden crown on their heads, and the water of the Ganges, all sweet with perfumes, runs at their feet" (163). These goddesses symbolise daylight and night. Author's marriage with them completes the cycle of a whole day. In this image, we can once again observe his philosophical attitude of viewing the universe as a whole entity.

Wholeness implies fulfilment, which in terms of spirituality can also be described as enlightenment. The mission of the guru-disciple relationship is to become enlightened by acquiring supreme knowledge. In the present story, we can observe how Pierrot is being indoctrinated into Rao's philosophical outlook of seeking wholeness or oneness in the various objects of nature/universe. In the course of the interaction, Pierrot feels that the natural objects in the park of Luxembourg resemble those that are found in India. Powered by the sails of imagination, he reaches India. He throws away the camel into the oasis. Now, he has an elephant, whom he calls Titi. Jeannot, a symbol of grim carnality in the story, is unable either to visualise his journey across the cultural borders or to comprehend his enlightenment. While the pleasures felt during sexual activities are ephemeral, ecstatic realisation of the truth that the universe represents unity in everything is an eternal bliss. Jeanne/Jeannot's ecstasy seems to fleet away with the departure of her lover but Pierrot's reaction after his forced separation from the author represents the long-lasting ecstasy felt in enlightenment:

> 'Pierrot!' shouted Jeanne. I let go his hand. He cried and cried and would not leave the Medici fountain. He saw the elephant in the forest. He saw the river Ganges. He saw the two goddesses with four hands and a crown of white gold on their on their

heads. He rode the elephant covered in silk and gold, and he came to my marriage. (167)

After that day, the author searched for Pierrot several times. His eagerness to meet the boy reveals a teacher's fondness for an ideal student. The author meets Pierrot after a month. This time the boy is accompanied by a middle-aged nanny. Pierrot runs into his arms. Their meeting can be interpreted as a reunion between the mentor and the disciple. It also symbolises the reunion of the East and the West. It seems that the disciple has outshone the mentor. He calls himself a Maharaja. He tells Rao that he rides an elephant and that the wedding has been over. Earlier he had seen faces on the buttons of the author's suit and now he shows the author that there were faces on the buttons of his favourite navy suit.

Activities

1. Open an atlas and locate the following countries: Austria, Spain, France, Saudi Arabia.
2. Read Walter de la Mare's poem "Arabia" and check for yourself the images of Arabia that you come across.
3. In the story Rao has mentioned the life span of Anne of Austria as "(1629-1687?)". Is it the correct life span? Write a note on Anne of Austria.
4. What do you know about *The Arabian Nights*?
5. What do understand by the literary term "folklore"? Can you give an example?
6. How old is Pierrot? What do you know about his parents?

5.16.7 Major Symbols

'Marriage' is a recurring motif and a major symbol in this story. As we have discussed in the previous section, it symbolises the union of the self with the world, which is co-habited by different cultural and ethnic groups. Morgantic marriages (we have discussed this in the earlier section) symbolise formal unions in which the souls do not unite to feel the oneness permeating the universe. These unions are made perfunctorily. These are like the 'proxy marriages' which were solemnised between the princes and the princesses as a ritualistic part of political negotiation between kingdoms. The futility of such a marriage is implied in the reference to Anne of Austria. On the other hand, the author's wedding with the goddesses, one as dark as the bee (night) and the other as white as butter (day), represents symbolically the union of the masculine and the feminine. It

implies the totality or completeness of existence embedded in the myth of *ardhanarishwar,* which is the half-male and the half-female figure.

In the Hindu mythology, the Ganges flows from the "tangled coils" of Lord Shiva's hair. The image of the Ganges flowing from the heads of the goddesses represents the *ardhnarishwar* myth or the shiva-shakti archetype. The merging of the opposite genders is "suggestive of the syzygy of Jung's anima and animus" (Sharma, R.L. 121). The word "syzygy" means conjunction of the opposites, such as the sun and the moon. The *shiva-shakti* archetype is implied in the imagery of author's wedding with daylight and night. It can be further explained that ''movement and activity of the universe (Shiva being its agent) is dependent on Shakti (the embodiment of Power) who imbues the world with motion" (Sharma, R. L. 121). The diurnal and the nocturnal attributes of the goddesses represent duality. However, this duality implies conjunction of polarities (sygyzy) through which a monistic whole is being born. When Pierrot tells the author at the end that the wedding is over, the idea of considering the East and the West as a monistic whole, a unanimous part of the universe, is communicated.

The River Ganga flowing from the heads of the goddesses has symbolic ramifications. In Hindu mythology, Ganga (the personified form of the river) is the eldest daughter of Himalaya and sister of Uma, Shiva's wife. Bhagiratha, a sage, dedicated himself in hard penance for bringing Ganga from the heaven to the Earth so that the mortals can taste divinity. In order to control her torrential flow, Shiva held her in his matted coils, after which she descended on Earth as seven streams. Due to Ganga's descent, Bhagiratha's ancestors, who had been cursed by Rishi Kapila, were spiritually liberated. Since then, the Ganges has become an embodiment of divinity to the Hindus: "The Ganga through apotheosis is the symbol of ultimate purity as far as freedom from the continual cycle of birth, death and rebirth is concerned" (Sharma, R. L. 153). Rao represents the River Ganga at two levels: "At the mundane level, the water of the Ganga is just water. It can be perceived, heard, touched, felt, tasted, seen and smelt. At the spiritual level, however, Ganga is eternal truth and pure consciousness" (Sharma, R. L. 155).

As far as Rao's symbolic representation of women in the story is concerned, Anne of Austria, Jeanne/Jeannot and the Sorbonnard girls symbolise the tangible form of femininity. They lack the spiritual attribute of the River Ganga, with which the two goddesses have been graced. Therefore, with these women, the author symbolically representing "Shiva," cannot unite in the mythic androgynous form of *shiva-shakti*. A mundane-self needs to acquire a sort of spiritual consciousness in order to break the hierarchical/racial barriers, which represent nothing but the ego, for uniting with the multiple selves located in the

different ethnic-cultural spaces. This is how non-duality is achieved through assimilation of dual forms.

Activities

1. Prepare a list of the symbols in "India: A Fable."
2. Write a note on Carl Jung, the psychoanalyst.
3. What idea of marriage do you get in the story?
4. Do you think that the symbolic references have made the text metaphysical?

5.16.8 Significance of the title

The title "India: A Fable" may seem intriguing since this short story is set in Luxembourg, France. The subtitle "A Fable" adds to the complication. 'Fable' refers to a short story which often includes animals as characters and sometimes incorporates elements of myths and legends. It usually ends with a moral. It reminds us of our childhood days when we enjoyed the stories in *Aesop's Fables*. *Aesop* was a storyteller in ancient Greece, whose characters were mostly personified animals. Although Rao's short story does not consist of animal characters, the two animals—the wooden camel and the imaginary elephant—have a symbolically significant role in the story. Kiki, the wooden camel, stands for the stereotyped image of the Oriental world. Titi, the elephant, whom Rao introduces to Pierrot as an iconic animal of India, broadens his idea about the oriental world, which he explores indirectly by listening to stories from the adults. The story concludes with the implied message that the universe should be perceived as an undivided entity, where the co-existence of polarities suggest that one form is complementary to the opposite form.

In terms of geopolitical concerns, India is just the name of a country on the political map of the world. The title, however, provokes us to look at the Indian nation from the metaphysical aspect. This is elucidated in the course of the narrative set within an allegorical framework. It also makes us think about the connection between the nation and the literary term 'fable.' In one of the previous sections, we have come across Rao's principle that by infusing the tempo of Indian life in our English expression, we have to strengthen the generic roots of Indian Writing in English. By narrating the nation in terms of indigenous philosophy and mythology, Rao has put his principle into practice. The story conveys his nationalist urge of representing the postcolonial nation as an embodiment of the slogan "unity in diversity." Being an expatriate writer, he wanted to feel at home in an alien land by disseminating the cultural ideologies of his homeland. A unique fact regarding 'fable' is that it has its origin in both Europe and in India. Thus, this genre becomes the

meeting point for the East and the West, thereby eradicating the shadow-lines of racial and cultural prejudices, which were drawn during colonialism.

A fable tries to teach a lesson to the readers/listener. The instructive approach in Rao's fable can be observed in the interaction between the author and the French child. Their statements and remarks upholding the pedagogical theme of the narrative is revealed in the following interaction between Pierrot, the student, and Rao, the teacher:

> 'And the goddesses—they come riding the camels?'
>
> 'No, I told you, they ride elephants.'
>
> Yes, yes. They ride elephants. Two goddesses and they ride elephants.' (163)

In this extract, we can observe very clearly that the author's attitude is that of a teacher, who makes an authoritative effort to rectify the errors of his student. He knows well that if Pierrot is not able to comprehend the cultural distinctiveness of India, then, he would not be able to understand the values ingrained in the Indian culture. In other words, he would not be able to read the Indian nation as a story with a moral. The above analysis justifies the title "India: A Fable."

Activities

1. Do you remember any fable that you have read in your childhood?
2. What are the characteristics of a 'fable?'
3. Can you suggest an alternative title to this story? Justify your answer with textual references.
4. Comment on the two animals in the story.
5. What is the moral in Rao's fable?

5.16.9 A Note on the epigraph

According to Chris Baldick's *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms,* an epigraph is a quotation or motto that is placed at the beginning of a book, chapter, or poem as an indication of its theme (83). The story "India: A Fable" has a very significant epigraph, which is as follows: "*Advayataivasiva.*" The English translation of this Sanskrit phrase has been given by the author: "*Non-duality alone is auspicious*" (emphasis original). Keeping in mind the fact that this story is set in Luxembourg, this epigraph can be read as an expatriate's introspection of the traditional-cum-cosmopolitan self through his philosophical outlook, which is rooted in Vedanta, an ancient branch of Indian philosophy.

In one of the previous sections, we have discussed that Rao was born into a family which followed, down the generations, the *Advyaita (monism)* philosophy of Shankaracharya, a Vedanta scholar. Vedanta deals with detachment of the self from ego and other worldly assets through meditation for achieving *moksha* or liberty from the cycle of life and death. Kaushal Sharma explains that there are three major philosophies in the *Vedanta*: "the *Advaita* expounded by Shankaracharya (788-820), the *Vishistadvaita* upheld by Ramanuja (1067-1137) and *Dvaita* propounded by Madhavacharya (1197-1276)" (3). He further informs us that "[a]ll these theories are related to Jiva-Brahman relationship, prescribing different paths for man's spiritual elevation" (3). Roshan Lal Sharma observes that the "*Vedantic* concept of *Advaitam,* of the presence of One in all, and the world being the manifestation of the Absolute *Brahman,* often finds an eloquent, epiphanic expression in his (Rao's) writings" (5).

"In the Indian tradition, literature is a way of realizing the Absolute (Brahman) through the mediation of language" (Parthasarathy viii). R. Parthasarathy writes that in an interview with him, Rao had commented, "I think I try to belong to the great Indian tradition of the past when literature was considered a *sadhana"* (viii). Raja Rao considered his literary engagement as *sadhna* (perseverance) for achieving spiritual fulfilment. This is reflected in the guru-disciple theme in "India: A Fable." The symbolic significance of seeing faces on the buttons represents the spiritual quest of the self. Shiva, whom Rao mentions in the epigraph, is not only the god of destruction in Hindu mythology, but also the archetype of the Self in Jungian terms (Sharma, R.L. 121). In terms of psychoanalysis, the "self is a symbol of wholeness or individuation. Shiva in his completeness, however, goes far beyond this. He is totality of being in a cosmic sense" (Sharma, R.L. 121). The Sanskrit phrase "*Advayataivasiva"* implies the realisation of the self as an undivided entity in a cosmic sense. He wants to feel the oneness of his self with the universe by connecting and communicating with the selves belonging to different cultural and national domains. In this way, he shows that in spite of its being an ancient philosophy, Vedanta has its relevance in the modern society which has become spiritually barren. Non-duality or a feeling of cosmic oneness with the objects in the universe is necessary for restoring spiritual fertility in a mundane bonding between individuals. Spiritual fertilisation of ideas that takes place during a pedagogical intercourse leads to reinvention of the self in this universe. The epigraph, thus rightly complies with the title and the themes of the story.

Activities

1. Identify the major theme/s in "India: A Fable."
2. In what ways can you relate the epigraph to the theme/s in the story?

5.16.10 Summing Up

"India: A Fable" is a sophisticated text in which we come across the major characteristics of Rao's literary style. It also introduces us to the postcolonial trend of using Indian myths and aspects of Indian philosophy in Indian writing in English. Through these stylistic devices, Rao creates a counter-narrative to the stereotyped image of India represented by the litterateurs of the West in their orientalist texts. By narrating the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the Indian nation, Rao has countered the orientalist narratives that represent India as nothing more than an exotic landscape. His mission of rescuing the nation from the clutches of literary colonisation is reflected in the very title "India: A Fable." This short story demonstrates how Rao's nationalist urge flows into his literary productions.

5.16.11 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-Answer Type Questions

1. Comment critically on Rao's philosophical outlook in his short story "India: A Fable."
2. Discuss "India: A Fable" as a symbolic text.
3. Make a critical assessment of Raja Rao's contribution to Indian Writing in English.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Comment critically on the setting of the story.
2. Justify the title "India: A Fable."
3. Discuss the representation of women in the story.

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. Write short notes on 'Fable' and 'Epigraph.'
2. Why dose the child become fond of the author?
3. What is the author's attitude towards the child?

5.16.12 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 17 ❐ Ruskin Bond – “Escape from Java”

Structure

5.17.1 Objectives

This unit seeks to deal with Ruskin Bond’s short story, “Escape from Java”. While focusing on the historical and cultural backgrounds of this story, it aims to acquaint the learners with the major themes employed by Bond in writing this creative piece. After reading this unit, the learners are expected to understand the subtle nuances of Bond’s art of composing short narrative pieces.

5.17.2 Introduction

Ruskin Bond (1934-), an iconic writer of the Anglo-Indian descent, has made significant contribution to Indian Writing in English by writing prolifically for the young as well as for the adult readers. His first novel *The Room on the Roof was* written at the age of seventeen. Since then, he has produced several novels and short stories, which are set mostly in the foothills of the Himalayas. He was born in Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) and had grown up in towns such as Jamnagar (Gujrat), Dehra (Uttarakhand), Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) and Delhi. Currently, he lives in Mussoorie (Uttarakhand) with his adopted family.

Bond’s creative oeuvre is varied. He has written short stories, novels, and edited anthologies. Ruskin Bond’s first novel *The Room on the Roof* had fetched him the John Llewellyn Memorial Prize in 1957. Its sequel is *Vagrants in the Valley.* His other notable works are *Delhi is not Far, The Sensualist, The Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories, The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra.* He has also written a memoir called *Scenes from a Writer’s Life*. He received Sahitya Akademi Award in

1992 for his book *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra.* He has been graced with prestigious national awards such as "Padmashri" in 1999 and "Padmabhushan" in 2014. His works such as *A Flight of Pigeons, The Blue Umbrella* and *Susanna's Seven Husbands* have been adapted into films by eminent filmmakers in Bollywood such as Shyam Benegal (*Junoon*) and Vishal Bharadwaj (*The Blue Umbrella, 7 Khoon Maaf*).

5.17.3 Ruskin Bond as an Anglo-Indian Author

In his narratives, the description of the flora and the fauna of the hill stations are complemented by the author's own childhood memories of growing up in Dehra. Bond represents, among others, the domiciled Europeans and the Anglo-Indian people residing in these places. His representation throws light on the life and society of this group of people who were representatives of the colonial rule in India. Being born into that society, Bond confesses in the "Preamble, Prelude, Prologue" to his memoir *Scenes from a Writer's Life* that he had to resolve his inner conflicts for saying 'I am an Indian' (xv). Like most of the Anglo-Indian children of his time, he was brought up as per European cultural norms. His childhood memories are fraught by his father's plans for going back 'home,' that is England. After completing the school degree from Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, he had gone to England for better prospects. It was during his stay there for four years that he had realised his rootedness in India. Nostalgia of the mountains, valleys, forests, fields and friends in India had made him so much homesick that he has observed "no sooner had I set foot in the West, than I wanted to return to India and to all that I had known and loved" (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xv).

To him India is more of an atmosphere than a land (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xv). His familiarity with the people, animals, nature and culture in this environment instilled in him a sense of security of being at home. The gamut of his literary works is but a creative recreation of this 'homely' environment which had a deep-seated impact on his mixed-racial identity: "Being a child of changing times, I had grown up with divided loyalties; but at the end of the journey I had come to realize that I was blessed with a double inheritance" (*Scenes from a Writer's Life* xvi). Thus, when we read the adventures and the experiences of Rusty, an Anglo-Indian boy, in his novels such as *The Room on the Roof* and *The Vagrants in the Valley* and also in anthologies such as *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra,* we can observe the implications of Bond's "double inheritance." On the one hand, his fiction communicates the anxiety of bearing the legacy of partly British and partly Indian origin, and on the other hand, it expresses his joy to feel at home in the social matrix of culturally diverse India.

In The *Room on the Roof*, we can observe that racial hybridity disturbed his young mind, which he represented through Rusty's groping for facts: "His guardian was pink, and the missionary's wife a bright red, but Rusty was white. With his thick lower lip and prominent cheekbones, he looked slightly Mongolian, especially in a half-light. He often wondered why no one else in the community had the same features" (11). Prior to the Independence, the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians, who lived in the foothills of the Himalayas, were mostly referred to as one community. However, Rusty's remark on his physical appearance shows that racial differences persisted among the members of this white society. The Anglo-Indian community, to which Rusty belonged, was formed as a result of interracial marriages between European men and Indian women. People of unmixed origins held prejudiced views against the racially hybrid persons. As a result of this, derogatory terms such as 'half-caste,' 'eight annas' and 'blacky whites' were used to refer to the members of the Anglo-Indian community.

His racial hybridity had placed Rusty in the liminal space from where he could view critically the attitudes of the local people as well as those of the pukka-bred Europeans. Critiquing the latter group, he points out that to his guardian, Mr. Harrison, the missionaries and their neighbours, the bazaar in Dehra was the "real India," "a forbidden place—'full of thieves and germs'" (*The Room on the Roof* 10). In the story "The Last Tonga Ride," the Ayah scolds Rusty for accompanying Bansi, the tonga-driver, whom she believes to be a rogue affected by tuberculosis (125). Rusty knew that such prejudices were considered as serious issues within the white community residing in the hilly regions of Northern India. So, he was apprehensive that if, by chance, the Ayah caught him taking a joyful ride on Bansi's tonga, then, that would become his last tonga ride (135).

In the "Author's Note" of his collection Rusty*: The Boy from the Hills (2003),* Bond tells us that Rusty represents his alter ego (vii). Auto-biographical resonances in the stories of Rusty reveal Bond's attitude towards different Indian communities, which unlike the one exhibited by the European characters of his fictional works, is full of empathy and discretion. In "The Last Tonga Ride," Rusty's excitement on seeing the bazaar, his stealthy rides on Bansi's tonga and his honest description of the racial prejudices of the white people manifest his authorial endeavours to represent the boy as one belonging to this country. Stories such as "The Tree Lover," "The Funeral," "Coming Home to Dehra," and "The Last Tonga Ride" represent not only the persistence of colonial values in his Westernised upbringing but also his deep attachment with the flora and fauna of the hills. By associating his alter ego's identity with the topography of a particular region of the Indian territory he tries not only to strengthen his own sense of belonging to this

country but also to resolve the conflict in his community identity. He tries to represent his community as an inseparable part of culturally diverse India and justifies his national identity in the following words: "'I am an Indian'—in the broadest, all-embracing, all-Indian sense of the word" (xv-xvi *Scenes from a Writer's Life*).

In this all-embracing cultural space of India, Rusty's stories representing Anglo-Indian life in the colonial milieu have gained wide popularity. These stories provide an alternative view of the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. In his novella *A Flight of Pigeons*, Bond presents an alternative view of Indian nationalism by representing the trials and tribulations of the European families during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 through the narrative of Ruth Labadoor, an Anglo-Indian girl, and her captor, Javed Khan. Such a narrative can also be read as a text of alternative history, which testifies to the hangover of colonial legacy on his postcolonial consciousness. This hangover, however, fills his mind with the memories of his father, whose untimely death had left him bereft of parental affection in childhood.

Rusty's deep attachment with his father is reflected in stories such as "The Funeral" and "Escape from Java." When Rusty was very young, his mother had left his father and had married a Punjabi businessman. Her indifference towards Rusty and even towards his infant half-brother has been made explicit in the story "Coming Home to Dehra." These as well as the other stories in the anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*, are but fragmented images of Bond's own childhood. However, one has to keep in mind the fact that in spite of being the author's alter ego, Rusty is a fictional persona. While studying these stories, we should concentrate more on understanding Bond as a writer than as an individual. His lucid style of storytelling has made him one of the most popular writers in India.

Activities:

1. Consult *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills* and find out the number of stories on Rusty included there. Mention what flora and fauna find mention in the stories.
2. Consider how Ruskin Bond, an Anglo-Indian author, can be considered as an Indian English writer. Is there any conflict between Indianness and Anglo-Indian identity?
3. What kind of landscape do you find in the short stories written by Ruskin Bond? Does the story prescribed in your syllabus deviate from that? If so, how?
3. Can you mention any other Anglo-Indian author writing in India now? Mention some of his creative works.
4. Find some autobiographical echoes mentioned in the section above? How does Rusty represent Bond's 'alter ego'?

5.17.4 "Escape from Java": Critical Understanding of the Text

The story "Escape from Java" is taken from the anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*. It is set in Java, an island in Indonesia. Java had been a Dutch colony for a century or so before it was invaded by the British in 1811. However, the British returned it to the Dutch through the Treaty of Paris. During the Second World War, Japan was gradually taking over the British colonies in Southeast Asia. The story is a first person narrative. Rusty begins his narrative by describing such a phase of national crisis. After the fall of Singapore to the Japanese army, the inhabitants of Java had become apprehensive about its consequences. Rusty specifies that the year was 1940 and at that time he was just nine years old. The boy from the hills in Dehra had gone to Java to spend time with his father who had been there for six months on an official tour. He worked for a firm dealing in rubber and had to travel to different countries. The rubber firm had sent him to Batavia, presently known as Jakarta, for opening a new office in partnership with a Dutch company. There, Rusty had befriended Sono, a Javanese boy of his age, whose father, Mr. Hartono, was a professor in a college. Mr. Hartono knew several languages such as Dutch, Chinese, Javanese and a bit of English. His multilingual proficiency suggests that Java was inhabited by people of different cultures and nationalities.

Rusty and Sono had become good friends because the latter was the only boy he knew in the neighbourhood who could speak English. Both spent time together by playing and flying kites. The air raids by the Axis forces had not only stopped their kite flying but also had injured them one day when they had gone to the countryside on their cycles. They had to hide themselves under a table or a bed whenever the fighter planes flew low. By narrating these details, Bond represents the atrocities of the war from the perspective of a nine-year old boy who "knew very little about worldly matters" (61). After being wounded by the shreds of glasses scattered during the explosion of the bomb, the two children were very much scared. They ran for life to escape the bombers who were chasing them madly from above. This incident highlights the fact that cruelty in war leads to insensitivity and loss of sanity among grown-up people.

Mr. Hartono and Sono were anxious about Rusty and his father's escape from the impending horrors of the war in Java. The refugees in the Indonesian islands and Singapore were hurrying their way either to Colombo or to Bombay. With the defeat of Great Britain, it had become evident that the Dutch would be overpowered. The fate of the Javanese people was already decided: "they would be exchanging their Dutch rulers for Japanese rulers" (61). However, there were people like Mr. Hartono, who believed that Java would

become an independent nation in near future, which turned out to be true. Java gained her freedom in 1949.

The nationalist urge of the Javanese people was non-aggressive. In spite of the fact that the Dutch rulers were unpopular among the Javanese people, the latter did not have any personal grudge against the Europeans. Rusty observes that he could walk safely in the streets. Sometimes, children in the Chinese neighbourhood yelled at him calling '*Orang Balandi'* which means "Dutchman." To them, "all white people were the same" (64). The members of the Anglo-Indian community, as we have noted earlier, also preferred to identify themselves with their English forefathers. It becomes clear when Rusty makes the following statement in response to the children, who took him to be a Dutch: "I didn't know the language well enough to explain that the English weren't Dutch" (64). Rusty's belief that they would be going to England recurs as a motif of anxiety among Anglo-Indian people who considered England as their homeland and yearned to settle down there for vindicating their 'English' identity. The escape from Java can be symbolically interpreted as an escape from the anxiety of being represented as non-English. The crisis of lying between and betwixt two racial-cultural axes usually intensifies during a situation of general crisis such as war.

Their escape from Java began one early morning in a truck driven by the Dutch businessman, Mr. Hookens, who was his father's colleague. Sono gave him a seahorse made of jade as parting gift and told him that the token would bring goodluck. They carried minimum luggage consisting of "a few clothes…business papers, a pair of binoculars, one stamp album, and several bars of chocolate" (71). On their way, Rusty observed the destruction caused by the air raids: "We drove through the still, quiet streets of Batavia, occasionally passing burnt-out trucks and shattered buildings" (72). The truck brought them to the Sunda Straits, which was in another part of Java, almost a hundred miles away from Batavia. From there, they had to board an old, worn out sea plane which was to take them to Bombay. Apart from Rusty and his father, there were four other passengers in the plane, among whom three were Dutch and the odd man out was a Londoner, Mr. Muggeridge. In the course of the escape journey, there developed a cordial relationship between Mr. Muggeridge and Rusty's father, who introduced himself as Mr. Bond. From a critical perspective, the bond between them suggests that the British people, who generally looked down upon the Anglo-Indians for their racial hybridity, were diplomatic enough to treat them as equals at the time of difficulty. Rusty's father shared with him the meager refreshments he had in his stock. This apparently exhibits his kindness but speaking critically, it reveals the pro-British attitude of the members of the Anglo-Indian community.

Mr. Muggeridge, a motor mechanic, had been left behind in a Chinese bar when his unit was evacuated from Java. The fact that he had become war wrecked was apparent from his "scruffy" appearance (74). On receiving a boiled egg from Mr. Bond, he was so thrilled that he made the following comment: "A real egg, too! I've been livin' on egg powder these last six months. That's what they give you in the Army. And it ain't thens' egg they make it from…It's either gulls' or turtles' eggs!" (76). On being told by Mr. Bond that the powder was made from the eggs of snakes, he turned pale. The shocking impact of the war and also that of being marooned in the sea for a few days had an adverse effect on their sanity. While discussing political leaders such as Churchill, Hitler, Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. Muggerridge abruptly spoke about Betty Grable, an American actress.

The crisis was further aggravated when something went wrong with the engine of the plane and the passengers along with the pilot-cum-captain had to land the plane on the Indian Ocean with a terrific jerk. As a result of this unusual landing, Mr. Muggeridge's nose started bleeding and one of the passengers, whose neck had been broken, met with death. Water started to inundate the cabin. The survivors put on their life jackets and sheltered themselves in a dinghy. With the tropical sun shining overhead, it was really hot in the sea. Nausea, stirred by the rise and fall of the dinghy, prevented them from eating anything. Recovering from the sea sickness, Rusty enquired his father about his treasured stamp album and was in turn informed that it had got drowned and lost. They looked for distress rockets to send signals to the flying planes, which they hoped would come down for their rescue. The next life-threatening danger was the sharks. These monstrous creatures had been chasing the dinghy for quite a long time. The passengers were afraid that they might become their food in case the dinghy capsized. Mr. Muggeridge battled with those sea monsters by throwing his shoes at them. Apart from the seasickness and the sharks, limited stock of drinking water also emerged as a big problem. They could drink only when it rained.

Like Mr. Muggeridge, Rusty's father too exhibited nervousness. The latter started keeping his smoking pipe between his lips although there wasn't any tobacco in it. He also had illusions of hearing the buzz of planes. One of the Dutchmen suffered from amnesia and he kept on pointing out to the horizon as the shore of Batavia. Seasickness coupled with the anxiety of drifting towards the unknown had affected them so severely that all of them had become victims of delusions. Since, there was nothing to be seen except water, they started imagining things that they wished to see.

Finally, they were rescued by a fishing boat with huge sails. They reached Bombay after a few days. Rusty's father had to sell his rare stamps for paying the rent of a comfortable hotel. Mr. Muggeridge went back to England. He sent them a postcard with the message that "the English rain was awful!" (87). Perhaps, he had sent this message intentionally to console the little boy, whose wish of going to England was not fulfilled. Rusty was happy that he could retain Sono's gift, the jade sea-horse. The thought that it would bring him good luck filled his mind with joy. The story ends with the narrator's sudden shift from the flashback to the present time when he, a grown up man, takes pride in possessing that token of childhood. Thus, the story ends with a positive note that one may come across crises and frustrations in life, but he/she should not lose hope. We do not know whether or not the jade sea-horse brought Rusty good luck but it is evidently a symbol of optimism, which has helped him to endure the hardships of life. The author seems to communicate the message that we need to have positive attitude as our sea-horse for crossing the sea of troubles.

As far as characterisation is concerned, in this story, Bond has highlighted the apparent goodness in human nature. Through the personalities of Rusty's father and Mr. Hartono, he has tried to show that human values such as kindness, fellow-feeling and courage triumph over the atrocities of war, which represent inhumanity. Rusty and Sono are likely to inherit the qualities of empathy and resilience from their fathers. Representing the personalities of the adults from the perspectives of children is a sensitive matter, which Bond has handled very carefully in this story. Discussing about Bond's acumen in his stories dealing with children, Amita Aggarwal writes that "[t]he realization that children are hardly taken seriously by their elders, made him more serious towards them" (*The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond* 86).

Activities:

1. Open an atlas and find the geographical location of Java and Batavia (now called Jakarta). Gather some historical and socio-cultural information about the places.
2. Identify the two regions: South Asia and Southeast Asia. Which countries belong to these regions?
3. Prepare a list of the characters you come across in the stories.
4. What is the significance of the seahorse? Do you think that "The Seahorse" could have been an alternative title to "Escape from Java"? If so, why?

5.17.5 Major Themes in "Escape from Java"

War in "Escape from Java"

As it is suggested by the title, the story describes a harrowing experience that Rusty and his father had during the Second World War. This story is different from the other stories in the anthology for its setting and theme. It is the only story in the anthology, which presents 'war' as its focal theme. What seems to be more interesting in this context is that here 'war' has been represented from the perspective of a child narrator. We all know that ambitions of the rulers and the politicians are responsible for war. The author wants to draw our attention towards the fact that children like Rusty and Sono, who are completely ignorant of the ambitions and machinations of the power-thirsty people, have to pay the price during a war. In the preceding section, we have discussed how the air raids had intervened with the normal rhythm of their childhood. They had to give up flying kites, which was their favourite pastime. The blasts made such a deafening noise that they had to converse with each other in between air raids. In spite of being children, both had accepted the fact that they could not stay together for a long time. Rusty and his father would have to leave Java for safety because the Allied league, which was headed by Great Britain, had been losing its colonies in Southeast Asia to Japan representing the Axis league. Nine-year old Rusty had gathered from the interactions of the adults that the defeat of the Allied Forces in Southeast Asia would lead to de facto possession of Java by the Japanese rulers, but in any way it would not help Java to restore its pre-colonial status of an independent nation. The impending horrors of war offer the children an insight into the adult world. Sono cautions Rusty that if the Axis forces catch hold of him and other civilians belonging to the British Empire, they would be made to work in the railways and would be given rice with worms in it. Sono's opinion that the Japs would not distinguish between the soldiers and the civilians reveals the unquenchable animosity between nations at war.

Warfare had been highly mechanised during the Second World War. Scientifically developed weapons symbolised progress of technology. Cities were representatives of a nation's technological and economic advancement. That was one reason as to why the opposing forces had been desperate to cause more devastation in the urban space than the rural places. Violence in the Second World War had surpassed all records of inhumanity through incidents of mass massacre such as the holocaust and the dropping of the Atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On learning from Sono that there are no bombings in the countryside, Rusty had accompanied him to the countryside. As they were riding their cycles, a fighter plane targeted them. Their cycles were crushed in the blast and they

were bruised badly. As readers, we are left shell shocked to know about the impact of the blast on their tender bodies:

> I felt a stinging sensation in my hands and legs, as though scores of little insects had bitten me. Tiny droplets of blood appeared here and there on my flesh. Sono was on all fours, crawling beside me, and I saw that he too had the same small scratches on his hands and forehead, made by tiny shards of flying glass. (67)

It was a narrow escape for them. The experience taught them the lesson that no part of the island was safe during the War. Escape from Java had become an utmost necessity for escaping the atrocities of the Axis forces in Southeast Asia.

War affects mental peace of an individual by generating anxiety in his/her mind. While escaping from the war-torn island, Rusty becomes anxious for Sono and his family when he sees the "Japanese Zeros" (fighter planes) proceeding towards Batavia. Although the escape assured their survival against the bomb raids in Java and also instilled courage in his young heart, it could not recover the carefree self with which the boy from the hills had arrived in Java. From this perspective, the escape from Java can be described as a metaphorical journey from innocence to experience.

Identity crisis in "Escape from Java"

The theme of identity crisis features as a subtext of the story. Although the narrative is temporally set against the colonial backdrop, we have to keep in mind that the story was written in the post-colonial period. Ruskin Bond is a postcolonial author, whose stories about Rusty, his alter-ego, represent the problematics of being born into a mixed race community. In "Escape from Java" this becomes apparent as Rusty, the child narrator, expresses his obsession to identify himself with the English. In spite of the fact that the Anglo-Indians were considered to be a part of white community in India, we have already discussed in the first section that racial discrimination persisted within the community. The presence of the English colonisers in the Indian subcontinent, however, assured cultural security to the members of the Anglo-Indian community. Defeat of the Allied Forces not only revealed Britain's military and economic weaknesses but also paved way for the demolition of the Empire through decolonisation in Asia and Africa. It was evident from Mr. Bond's remark that since Britain, who was backed by her Empire, could not resist the Japanese invasions, the Dutch would not be able to persist their hold on Java (60). By referring to Mr. Hartono's belief that Java would become an independent nation in near future, the narrator/author opens up indirectly the issue of decolonisation, which had begun in the middle of the 1940s.

While demolition of the Empire decided the fates/identities of many South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, it left undecided the fate/identities of the members belonging to the Anglo-Indian community. We come to know from books such as Frank Anthony's *Britain's Betrayal in India (1969)* and Lionel Caplan's *Children of Colonialism (2001)* that the British people never considered the Anglo-Indians as their equals. After the Indian Independence in 1947 the British people had abandoned the Anglo-Indians completely. The indifferent attitude of the British towards the Anglo-Indians becomes apparent in Bond's story when Rusty tells us that the British soldiers in Java did not assure their safety (63). The indifference of the British soldiers represents the indifference of Britain towards her subjects in the colonies. While this indifference did not matter to the Indians or the Javanese people, it did for the Anglo-Indians because they had always identified themselves politically and culturally with the British colonisers.

The defeat of the Allied league in the Second World War had stirred in them the anxiety of losing their cultural identity, which justified their Englishness in the Indian subcontinent to a great extent. The other option for preserving their Englishness was to go to to England and settle down there as British citizens. In "Escape from Java" we can see that Rusty is almost desperate to go to England because he must have grown up with the community's notion that England was the homeland/fatherland for the Anglo-Indians. Since the identity of the community had been constructed on the basis of one's paternal lineage, England, the country from where the British colonisers had come, was considered as homeland by the Anglo-Indians. However, the futility of nurturing such a notion becomes clear through Rusty's failure to go to England. In spite of repeating time and again that they would be going to England, Rusty and his father lands up in India, the country where they were born. On the other hand, Mr. Muggeridge went back to England and resumed his life there although he found the English rain awful. The story ends with a positive note but it underlines the fact that the issue of Anglo-Indian identity had been a problematic issue since the colonial period. Under the heavy weight of the big historical incidents such as the World Wars, Holocaust and Atom bomb, the crisis of the Anglo-Indians has been submerged in the depths of obscurity. Being a post-colonial author, Bond tries to salvage the traces of his community's history by foregounding this crisis in his historical narratives. He makes an effort to assuage Rusty's anxiety by redefining the latter's identity as 'the boy from the hills.' Through this ascription, he tries to remove the obsessive hangover of colonialism from Rusty's personality and emphasises his rootedness to the Indian soil where he was born and raised. In this respect, "Escape from Java" can be read as a text that redefines Rusty's identity from the postcolonial perspective.

"Escape from Java" as a Father-Son Narrative

The stories of Rusty abound in autobiographical elements. If we look into the life of Ruskin Bond, we can see that his father was the dearest person to him. His parents had separated when he was a small boy. His mother had left his father and had married a Punjabi businessman. Absence of mother must have generated in him a strong sense of insecurity and loneliness. Being deprived of mother's affection, he had anchored his sense of parental longing solely in his father. Although his father died when he was just ten years old, his presence is like an indelible mark in Bond's childhood memories which he represents nostalgically in the stories on Rusty.

In "Escape from Java" we can observe Rusty's deep attachment to his father. When Batavia was being raided by the Japanese forces and there was no room for them in the ships, even then, Rusty had retained complete faith in his father's discretion: "I didn't worry. I had complete confidence in my father's ability to find a way out of difficulties" (63). Although he had short and stout structure, his sense of fellow feeling for others in the time of crisis made him a heroic figure in the eyes of his son. His compassionate attitude is revealed to us when he helps the co-passengers to come out of the drowning plane, assists them in putting on their life jackets and tries his best to comfort his little son in every possible way. We do not know whether he ate anything in the dinghy or not but he offered food to Muggeridge and dropped a piece of chocolate in Rusty's mouth when the latter had become very tired. Rusty could fall asleep in the dinghy because he knew that he was under his father's care and protection. In order to protect Rusty from the scorching heat of the sun, he gently covered the boy's face with his big handkerchief. He tried to entertain the child by telling that on reaching the shore of any big city such as Madras, Colombo or Bombay, they would eat in the best restaurant there. After reaching Bombay, he sold away some of his valuable stamps for arranging a comfortable boarding for his little son whom he could not provide a proper meal during the escape.

After reading this story, we can guess the extent of pain and emptiness that Rusty had felt after the untimely death of such a caring father. Perhaps, the memories of his father were like the seahorse which helped him swim across the sea of troubles all alone.

Activities:

1. Explain the terms 'Allied Forces' and 'Axis Power.' Try to understand their role in the Javanese context.
2. Who is the pure British character in the story? Discuss his cultural location.
3. Try to figure out the symbolic significance of the sea, airplane, dingy and seahorse.

5.17.6 Summing up

In Ruskin Bond's anthology *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills*, we can observe his sincere effort to represent the socio-cultural milieu of Northern India from the perspective of a small boy, whose community identity was a source of anxiety for him. The hangover of being a part of the 'white'/hybrid society in colonial India conflicts with Bond's postcolonial self. He is able to critique the racial prejudices of the British colonisers and figure out his own socio-cultural location in India. Auto-biographical details abound in Rusty's narratives. These stories present a wonderful mélange of factual and fictional elements. These characteristics can be well-observed in the story "Escape from Java." Bond's description of Rusty's experiences in war-torn Java is fictional, but his representation of Rusty's bond with his father is drawn from the facts of his own life. Similarly, Rusty's obsession with the issue of going to England is representative of the urge that most of the Anglo-Indian people nurtured in the years preceding the Indian Independence. Bond's lucid style of story-telling, his insightful representation of childhood and his rootedness to the foothills of the Himalayas, are some of the important features of his writing that has established him as an eminent Indian litterateur.

5.17.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-Answer Type Questions

1. Comment critically on Bond's contribution to Indian English literature.
2. Discuss the title of "Escape from Java."
3. Make a critical assessment of Bond's art of characterization in "Escape from Java."
4. Assess the role of Ruskin Bond as a postcolonial writer with special reference to the story in your syllabus.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Describe Rusty's attitude towards the flora and fauna of the hills.
2. Discuss the theme of father-son relationship with reference to the story in your syllabus.
3. Comment critically on Rusty's role as child narrator in *Rusty: The Boy from the Hills.*

4. What impression of Java do you get in "Escape from Java"?

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. Write a note on Rusty's obsession for England.
2. Why do you think the narrator has treasured the seahorse?
3. Comment on the role of Rusty's friend in "Escape from Java."

5.17.8 Suggested Readings

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Notes

Notes

Module - 6

Reading Indian English Literary Criticism

Unit -18 ❐ Indian English Literary Criticism : An Overview

Structure

6.18.1 Objectives

The unit will trace the journey of Indian English Criticism from the colonial to the post-colonial period, emphasising the contributions of the important Indian English critics and also discussing their critical perspectives. Students will find this unit interesting because traditional history books on Indian English Literature usually do not pay much attention to this area. This unit will help the learners to map the distinctive traditions of Indian English Criticism.

6.18.2 Introduction

In this unit we shall concentrate on Indian English Criticism which is a neglected area of study. "Literary criticism by the Anglo-Indians has been scanty," observed K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar as early as 1943 in his monograph *Indo-Anglian Literature* (55). Things have not changed much since then. In fact, critical traditions in Indian English Literature evolved quite late in comparison with other branches of the field such as poetry or fiction and hardly received any academic attention. In *Future Poetry* which was originally published serially in *Arya* between 1917 and 1920, Sri Aurobindo said, "It not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think" (3). K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar was indeed the first scholar to systematically record the rise and development of the tradition of 'Indo-Anglian' critical writings and evaluate its importance. Two of his earlier

works – *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943), a monograph, and *The Indian Contribution to English Literature* (1945), a more comprehensive book – contained chapters on this critical genre. However, both the books were written in the early 1940s and hence cannot offer any picture of the post-1945 developments in the field. M.K.Naik later included an updated section in his book *Indian English Literature 1980-2000* (2001). Since it was published about nineteen years back, it has not covered the recent developments in the field. In this unit we shall try to give a bird's eye view of the gradually unfolding field.

6.18.3 Indian English Literary Criticism: Dilemmas

India has a very ancient history of critical traditions which can be found, for example, in Sanskrit and Tamil aesthetics, but the corpus of critical writings in English developed when a group of highly talented Indian intellectuals, trained in the literary and critical traditions of English literature, emerged. The impact of the colonial education system was quite evident, but the influence of Indian classical works, both literary and critical, was palpable as well. In fact, at certain points of time there had been a healthy dialogue between English literary-critical canons and Indian classical ones. 'Indianness' also became a big issue in literary criticism. The ground reality of Indian class rooms and society at large asserted itself. In fact, Indian English writers may have been torn between these two opposite poles. The result may be a kind of uncertainty or dilemma. Makarand Paranjape rightly observes, "To live and write solely in English while living in India entails a peculiar kind of purblindness…. We Indian English critics are, thus, unsure of who we are, who we represent, and who we write for" (70). Later, during the post-colonial period, several other critical influences made their presence felt in IEL. Prominent among them were American New Criticism, European criticisms, Feminist criticism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism and of course different shades of Postcolonial criticisms. Here in this unit we shall try to trace the history of the development of Indian English criticism, its major proponents and the different traditions it followed. This will enable you to contextualise any critical piece that you may come across.

6.18.4 Defining Indian English Criticism

The question that may be asked is how we see Indian English criticism today. Does it necessarily mean that the texts and critical ideas written in English should be confined to Indian texts and contexts only? Does it mean that the critics should be of Indian origin, whether located in India or abroad? Is it inclusive of scholars of non-Indian descent making critical forays into the world of Indian English texts? Can the critical or theoretical

ideas be applied to other texts written in Indian or foreign languages and produced in India or in the diaspora? These questions which may be justifiably posed challenge any notion about the fixity of the canon of any literature or critical tradition. While in this unit we shall admit the possibility of wider applicability of any critical idea, we at the same time must be conscious of the cultural and linguistic context of any literary or critical product. Hence, we shall consult only those critical writings produced by Indians, located either in India or in the diaspora, on the literary-cultural works written in English. In this respect, you may keep in mind how critical thinkers and literary historians of Indian English writings such as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar used the two terms 'Anglo-Indian' writings and 'Indo-Anglian' writings in two different senses. This will also help you understand the text(s) included in your syllabus.

6.18.5 The Anglo-Indian Criticism

Interestingly, as we will find, criticism about Indian texts – poems, fiction or play – was initiated by English or European critics. These were usually small attempts and they fall under the category of what Iyengar and his ilk called 'Anglo-Indian' literary criticism. But before we take up what they called 'Indo-Anglian' literature/literary criticism, we may also discuss in brief what the 'Anglo-Indian' authors did in the field. This will acknowledge their contribution and also properly contextualise the writings of Indian literary critics. The chronology of the appearance of important works both by the Europeans interested in India and its cultures as well as by Indians will also be established if we do so. The critics of the former category initiated the process before the Indian critics took it in full earnest.

Thomas Edwards was one of the early European critics to publish a critical biography of Henry Derozio who was a reputed Indian poet of Eurasian origin in the early phase of Indian English poetry. The book is entitled *Henry Derozio: The Eurasian Poet, Teacher, and Journalist* (1884). In course of his discussion of the life and times of Derozio, Edwards made some attempts to briefly refer to some of his works. One may also refer to James Darmesteter, a French scholar, who included several articles in his book *English Studies* (1896). The articles in this book was translated from French into English by his wife Mary Darmesteter. The subjects of the articles were varied; they ranged from "Joan of Arc in England," "George Eliot's Letters," "The French Revolution and Wordsworth" to "Irish Political Ballads" and "A Mage in Paris." Interestingly, there are two critical essays on Indian subjects: one entitled "Calcutta" and the other called "Two Indian Books." First of the two books mentioned by Darmesteter is "Visha-Vriksha, the Poison Tree"

written by "Baboo Bankim Chandra Chatterjee" and the other was Behramjee Malabari's *Sketches of Indian Life in Gujerat*. The latter was written originally in English. In between his discussions of the two books, he also mentioned other Indian intellectuals and creative writers such as 'Keshub Chunder Sen,' Toru Dutt and Rajendralal Mitra. What is interesting is that he also traces the history of the emergence of Indians' writings in English. He observes, "Within the last twenty years there has sprung up an English literature of Hindoo origin" (285). He also observes,

> The semi-diffusion of a Western education has created the host of the Disclassed, who are no longer Hindoos in mind and soul, and yet who are certainly not English, whose sole ambition is to become a civil servant at thirty rupees the month, and who, sooner or later, inevitably swell the ranks of the political agitators and of the extremists of the native press. I speak of the mass. (285-6)

You may of course mull over the above comment and link this with the ones made by T. B. Macaulay in his *Minutes* (1835). You can also connect the emergence of this section of 'Disclassed' English-educated natives with the introduction of the new education policy suggested by Macaulay.

One may also mention the Irish critic James H. Cousin's book *New Ways of English Literature* (1917) which included two essays on "First Impressions of Tagore in Europe" and "The Philosopher as Poet: Arabindo Ghosh." The book was dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore. Sri Aurobindo was very much influenced by this book as he himself mentioned it in *Future Poetry*, "A book which recently I have read and more than once reperused with a yet un-exhausted pleasure and fruitfulness, Mr. James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*, is eminently of this kind (i.e. literary criticism of 'first order')" (3).

All these writers, along with others of European origin, offered critical opinions on the literary works produced in India (both written originally in English and in English translation).

Activities:

1. Guess the factors that may have impeded the development of Indian English criticism as a genre.
2. Would you include the books on history of Indian English Literature written by such eminent writers as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and M.K.Naik as part of the traditions of Indian English criticism? Explain.
3. What kind of 'dilemma' of Indian English critics has been mentioned in this unit? What do you think about this dilemma? Does it exist now?

4. What is the basic difference between the two terms 'Anglo-Indian' and 'Indo-Anglian' as discussed above?
5. Prepare a list of some 'Anglo-Indian' authors and their works not mentioned in this unit by consulting available books and web resources.
6. Collect some more information regarding the cultural interactions between James H. Cousin and Sri Aurobindo.

6.18.6 The Beginnings of Indian English Criticism

In 1943, as we have mentioned earlier, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observed, "Literary criticism by the Indo-Anglians has been scanty." He also opined that "Literary criticism produced by the Indo-Anglians is almost inescapably derivative and imitative" (*Indo-Anglian Literature* 55). In the beginning was the overwhelming impact of the colonial literary/ cultural norms on the colonised mind. This is how the Indian English literary criticism began. This is not unusual as the early Indian critics, like early Indian English poets, were overwhelmed by the language and literary norms of their masters. As time progressed and as Indian nationalist spirits became more and more assertive, Indian critics began to see literary works written in English from their own perspectives.

Iyengar points out that the 'Indo-Anglian' critical works can be categorised "under two heads: the criticism of English authors and English classics and the criticism of Sanskrit and the various modern Indian literatures" (*Indian Contribution* 219). In another book *Indo-Anglian Literature* he also sees the corpus from another point of view: those who worked from within the academic and those who were not professionally attached to educational institutions. He mentions some works produced by academic scholars. Some of them may be mentioned here: Dr. N. K. Siddhanta's *The Heroic Age in India*, Prof. P. K. Guha's *Tragic Relief* and *On Two Problems of Shakespeare*, Pandit Amaranatha Jha's *Shakespearean Comedy and Other Studies*; Dr. U. C. Nag's *The English Theatre of the Romantic Revival*; Prof. V. K. Ayappan Pillai's *Shakespeare Criticism*; Dr. Y. V. Yajnik's *The Indian Theatre*; Dr. S.C. Sengupta's *The Art of Bernard Shaw ;* Mohinimohan Bhattacharji's *Platonic Ideas in Spenser*. These, and similar other works, were born out of the academic scholar's natural and professional interest in the field. Among the works written by non-academic writers Iyengar mentions Rabindranath Tagore's essay on Kalidasa's Sakuntala, Mr. Nagendranath Gupta's *The Place of Man and Other Essays*, M. Chalapati Rao's essays on John Masefield, Mr. Subba Rao's *Modernists, Imagists and Futurists*, and Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon's study on Laughter. Iyengar observes the following in connection with the criticism on Indian literatures and cultures:

> It was thus that the late Romesh Chunder Dutt was inspired to write in English his *Literature of Bengal* (1877). More recently, Prof. Bhate has done his *Modern Marathi Literature* in English; so have K. M. Munshi, Birinchi Kumar Barua and Annada Shankar Ray with reference to Gujarati, Assamese and Bengali literatures respectively. Similarly, Masti Venkatesa Iyenger has given us an illuminating study of Valmiki's poetry; Aurobindo's studies of Bankim Chandra and Kalidasa's are also in English; and A. S. P. Ayyar's *Bhasa* is written somewhat on the lines of the English Men of Letters Series. (Indian *Contribution* 219*)*

Sri Aurobindo Ghose is one of the outstanding early critics. He left an indelible impact on later writers and critics. "In his best work he gives us not so much criticism as the poetry and the philosophy of criticism" (Iyengar, *Indo-Anglian Literature* 58). His magnanimous work *Future Poetry* is, according to Iyengar, "most interesting, informative and prophetic work of literary criticism" (58). It comprises the thirty-two instalments of essays published between December 1917 and July 1920 in the monthly review *Arya*. It begins with a chapter called "Mantra." Mantra indeed is a key element in the book. Another chapter, for example, has the title "Poetic Vision and the Mantra." It not only deals with the nature, essence, and 'the national evolution of poetry' but also offers insightful comments on the whole range of English poetry from the perspective of a sensitive Indian critic well-versed in languages like Bengali, Marathi, Gujrati, Sanskrit, English, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, German, Italian and so on. He professes that future poetry will have the qualities of *mantra*: "That possibility is the discovery of a closer approximation to what we might call the *mantra* in poetry, that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth …" (10). Poetry, according to him, should have the qualities of five eternal powers which are Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and Spirit. The fusion of these powers would elevate poetry to a greater level. He makes radical comments about English literary canonical poets and authors. C. D. Narasimhiah, for instance, draws our attention to Aurobindo's observations such as "Wordsworth states too much, sings too little" or that he is an "automobile running on insufficient petrol" (109) or "To be fed on the verse of Spenser, Shelley, Keats, Byron or Tennyson is no good preparation for the severe classics" (Narasimhiah 109). Narasimhiah summarises the importance of the book in the following words, "*Future Poetry* is thus the most intelligent expression of the Indian mind in criticism in our times, a work which embodies the highest wisdom of a race and a people and takes it further by assimilating the experience of other cultures and epochs and points to higher possibilities in future" (112). Besides *Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo also wrote many other monographs and essays.

Sri Aurobindo was a towering figure in Indian English criticism. He was followed by several other critics whose works contributed to the genre. Mention may be made of K. M. Khadye's *Benedetto Croce's Aesthetics Applied to Literary Criticism*, Shahid Suhrawardy's *Prefaces: Lectures on Art Subjects*, Bal S. Mardhekar's Arts *and Man*, *Two Lectures on an Aesthetic of Literature* and Ananda Coomeraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*. There has been a good crop of Shakespeare criticism by Indian writers. Newspapers and journals such as *The Modern Review, The Hindustan Review, Triveni, The Indian P. E. N., The Indian Review, The Hindu* generated a good number of critical works.

Activities

1. From which perspectives does K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar categorise Indian English criticism.
2. Consult relevant books and web sources to find out whether Sri Aurobindo has other critical works, besides *Future Poetry*. Prepare a list of some other important works written by him.
3. In this unit only a few early critics have been mentioned. Prepare a list of some other critics (not mentioned here) and their works.
4. Consult books on the history of Indian English literature including those by Iyengar and M.K.Naik and try to find out names of critics who contributed regularly to newspapers, journals and magazines.

6.18.7 Post-Colonial Critics

Independence of the nation-state was an important moment from socio-political and cultural points of view. The nation was now set to introduce its own ideas into the polity and decide on its own canons in the educational and cultural institutions. But, interestingly, India has already become a hybrid nation in the sense that the colonial cultural norms and legacies could not be shaken off, neither could it go back to its pre-colonial cultural models. Most importantly, English was retained and it remained a very important medium of communication. Indian English writers began to experiment with the acquired language. Indian criticism followed the British model for quite some time but from 1970s onwards radical changes in attitudes and literary canons began to creep in. The influence of New Criticism was palpable but soon Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, Feminism and Cultural Studies began to mould Indian English criticism. Post-colonialism and Feminism in particular had great impact on criticism.

Some of the eminent critics such as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and C. D. Narasimhiah continued contributing to the genre after the nation achieved freedom and helped shape the genre of critical writings. They were instrumental in introducing American Literature/Criticism and Indian English Literature (or 'Indo-Anglian' Literature). They also drew our attention to Indian critics like Sri Aurobindo or Ananda Coomerswamy. There were many critics who produced valuable works during the early post-independence decades. Special mention may be made of Sisir Kumar Ghosh, V .K. Gokak, D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu, P. S. Sastry, Darshan Singh Maini, V. Y. Kantak, Buddhadeva Bose, Sujit Mukherjee, P. Lal, Naresh Guha, Amiya Dev, and M.K.Naik among others. They created new critical traditions. They participated in the new canon formations in the newly independent nation-state. New areas of literary studies such as American literature, Commonwealth literature, Comparative literature and Indian English literature were being introduced in the academia.

Meenakshi Mukherjee, whose critical piece "Anxiety of Indianness" has been widely read by students like you, is one of the most important critics who firmly established Indian English literature in the canon of English Studies in India. In this she carried forward the traditions introduced by critics such as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and C. D. Narasimhiah. Srinivasa Iyengar, later followed by M.K.Naik, in fact paved the way for writing in a systematic manner the history of Indian English literature. In writing such a history for the first time, they had to face the challenges of historiography.

P.P. Raveendran points out that "Mukherjee's development as a literary critic can … be seen as a move away from these central ideologies of power in the direction of peripheral ideologies that would allow her to recognise her post-colonial, female existence" (48). Raveendran rightly points out the two perspectives – postcolonial and 'female' – which became important at this point of time in the cultural history of the nation. Mukherjee's book *Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (1971) is a landmark publication in the sense that it firmly placed Indian novels written in English in the canon of English Studies in India and acknowledged it as an "expression of authentic Indian reality" (Raveendran 49). Raveendran observes that "[n]ation and narration were yet to receive the kind of critical focus than they have received since" (49), and Mukherjee intervened in the discourses related to these. In *Realism and Reality: The Novel and the Society in India* (1985) she turned to the "emergence and growth of the novelistic tradition in Indian languages in the recent past as she examined many works written in Indian languages with special focus on *Pather Panchali*, *Godan* and *Samskara*. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (2000), another important work, is a collection of critical essays. These offer valuable insights into the

contemporary Indian English writings and trace their roots in the works of 19th century Indian works such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife.* Particularly notable for you are the essays like "Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*," "*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*: Fantasy or Fable?" and "The Anxiety of Indianness."

Along with Mukherjee, a good number of critics were responsible for new waves of critical-theoretical writings. M.K.Naik and Shyamala Narayan point out that during 1980-2000 period Post-colonialism was the 'fastest growing area of research' (240). They particularly mention *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (1996) edited by Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee and *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (1993, 1995) written by Harish Trivedi. Gauri Vishwanathan in her *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and English Rule in India* traced the imperial ideological positions in the colonial era led to the introduction of English Studies in India. She made meticulous archival studies and brought to our notice multiple documentary evidence.

One of the sources of these critical writings had been the diasporic space in the West. Most important critics whom we may mention in this context are Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Salman Rushdie, Avtar Brah and Arun Prabha Mukherjee. Their works deal with postcolonial contexts and diasporic cultural reality. They critiqued the existing canon, wrote about marginalised voices including those of women and the subaltern, and scripted a novel literary-cultural space in the academia. Homi K. Bhabha wrote well-known works such as *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994). His theories of liminality, hybridity, third space, ambivalence and mimicry received wide critical acclaim. His critical writings helped defining the diasporic existence and cultural productions. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak came into the limelight with 'deconstructionist strategies' applied to various fields like Marxism, Feminist, Post-colonialism. Her translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la Grammatologie* brought her to the global notice. The title of this translation is *Of Grammatology* (1976). She severely critiqued Western 'phalogocentric' criticism. Some of her well-known works are *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) and *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012). Her "Can the Subaltern Speak" is an iconic essay and it has been part of the postcolonial literary courses as well as in Feminist, Subaltern and Cultural Studies courses all over the world. Salman Rushdie, though primarily a novelist, wrote some critical works, most well-known of them is *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). In the title essay he speaks of a fragmented memory that helps re-establish the

memory of the homelands. In his opinion the homelands are mere imaginary constructs based on shards of broken memory. In this essay he makes observations about his homeland – India – and its multicultural heritages. He foregrounds the importance of the diasporic perspectives in the representation of the homeland. Avtar Brah is a well-known critic who speaks of intersectional nature of identity and hence discussed issues of politics of race, class and gender and similar other categories. She is a prominent figure in Diaspora Studies. Her most notable works include *Cartographies of Diaspora*: *Contesting Identities* (1996) and *Thinking Identities: Racism, Ethnicity, Culture* (1999). Arun Prabha Mukherjee also contributed to the discourses on Post-colonialism and diaspora with her works such as *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space* (1994) and *Post-colonialism: My Living* (1998).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan is a leading critic in Women's Studies. Her *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post-colonialism* (1993) foregrounded many little-known women's texts and showed how women displayed exemplary courage and resistance while encountering patriarchy. Kumkum Sangari's *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narrative, Colonial English* (1999) focusses on the Indian gender reality. Jasbir Jain argues in her *Feminising Political Discourse: Women and the Novel in India* that seeds of novel as a genre lay in the Indian native traditions although it received boost from the Western model. She examined a good number of works written in the regional languages in India. Jasodhara Bagchi is yet another prominent feminist author and activist of our time. She is well-known for her works like *Interrogating Motherhood* (2017) and other edited/co-edited volumes like *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal 1970-2000* (2005) and *The Trauma and the Tiumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (2003).

Other important critics of the time include G. N. Devy, Aijaz Ahmad and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Devy is best known for his *After Amnesia: Traditions and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (1992) in which he argues for a kind of 'nativism,' a return to *bhasa* traditions. This, according to him, will be a better answer for the cultural amnesia that occurred due to the pressures of colonial rule. Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations , Literatures* (1992) is a brilliant contribution to the postcolonial critical tradition as he examines contributions of Edward Said, Salman Rushdie and others from a Marxist point of view. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) is perhaps the best-known work of Dipesh Chakraborty. His "Adda, Calcutta: Dwelling in Modernity" (1999) is a notable contribution to Cultural Studies. Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (1996) discusses the concept of 'modernity' from the perspectives of media and migration studies.

Activities

1. Identify some eminent early post-colonial critics.
2. Prepare a list of later post-colonial critics.
3. Consult book and website sources to prepare a list of twenty-first century critics.

6.18.8 Summing Up

We have attempted to trace the birth and development of the genre of Indian literary criticism in this unit. While trying to trace the trajectory, we have taken note of the shifts of focus in the history of the development of the Indian English literary criticism. We have seen that the genre was initially influenced by the colonial model. But at the same time influences of Indian classical literary models were quite evident. While a great deal of critical works dealt with British and European texts, there were some which discussed Sanskrit and regional texts as well. Immediately after the independence, the Indian nation-state tried to introduce new canons and experimented with new subject-matters and styles. But the most important shifts occurred during the 1970s and 1980s when new critical ideas came from the West. Post-colonialism was a trend that went well with the spirit of India, a former colony. A host of critics from both the nation and the diaspora contributed to the growth of critical corpus. We have tried to sketch this briefly. In this unit we have discussed only a few of the critics who had left a permanent impression. It can be hoped that you will be able to map the contemporary field as comprehensively as possible and relate it to any critical text that you may come across.

6.18.9 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-answer Type Questions

1. Explain why Indian English criticism took time to evolve into a full-fledged genre. Discuss the role of Anglo-Indian literary criticism in this respect.
2. Write a critical note on the early ‘Indo-Anglian’ literary criticism.
3. Assess the contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the Indian English criticism.
4. Write a critical essay on the Postcolonial literary criticism in Indian English.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Choose any three major Indian English critics and write brief notes on them.
2. What is your idea about the role of Indian diasporic critics to the development of Indian English criticism?

3. Write a short note on the feminist writers who contributed to the development of Indian English criticism.

Short-answer Type Questions

1. Write short notes on the following:

   (a) Sri Aurobindo (b) Homi Bhabha (c) Meenakshi Mukherjee

   (d) Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak (e) Salman Rushdie

6.18.10 Suggested Readings

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Unit - 19 ❐ Meenakshi Mukherjee – "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English"

Structure

6.19.1 Objectives

This unit analyses Meenakshi Mukherjee's insightful essay, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English". It will make the students aware of Mukherjee's critical perspectives on Indian English novels and the notion of Indianness. The learners, after reading this unit, will be able to appreciate different aspects of a critical essay.

6.19.2 Introduction

Dear students, this unit, for a change, will not concentrate on a creative writing. The focus instead will be on a critical essay written by one of the doyens of Indian English criticism. We have very little comprehensive discussion on the non-fictional critical writings – for instance, on critics like K. R. S. Iyengar, C. D. Narasimhiah, M. K. Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee who helped establish Indian English literature as a distinct category to be studied in the departments of English literature and Cultural Studies. Here in this unit we shall discuss "Anxiety of Indianness," a non-fictional piece by Meenakshi Mukherjee. It is included in her book *The Perishable Empire* (2000). We shall also discuss how Mukherjee was one of the key figures who brought fresh perspectives in the study of English literature in India. Prior to the 1970s, English literature meant mainly British literature, allowing only marginal spaces to American literature, not to

speak of other literatures written in English in formerly colonised countries. Although there was a large corpus of Indian English literary texts, they were not thought worthy to be studied in institutions of higher education. By speaking in favour of inclusion of Indian English literature and Indian literatures in English translation in the syllabi of Indian universities, and doing it herself in Hyderabad University, she was helping the transformation of English Studies in India. Recognitions that the Indian English writers have been getting all over the world now testifies to the wisdom of Mukherjee and her peers. Mukherjee is truly a postcolonial critic from this point of view.

6.19.3 Meenakshi Mukherjee: Life and Works

Meenakshi Mukherjee (1937-2009) taught at different universities in India. She was also visiting professor at several universities like the University of Texas at Austin, University of Chicago, University of California, The University of Canberra and so on. She was a Sahitya Akademi awardee.

She was one of the doyens (like K. R. S. Iyenger, C. D. Narasimhaiha, M. K. Naik) who promoted Indian English literature as worthy to be studied in institutions of higher education. She contributed immensely to the cause of building up a critical tradition of Indian English literature. She upgraded Indian English criticism to a level of rigour and sophistication. Being a multilingual scholar well-versed in Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi and Marathi, she knew the importance of Bhasha literatures for the Indian students of English literature. That is why she not only wrote on Bhasha literatures but also was instrumental in including texts from Bhasha literatures in translation in the syllabi of English literature in Indian universities.

Many of her writings have been collected and compiled in different volumes and anthologies. She is the author of *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novels in English* (1971), a path-breaking book on Indian English literature. *Considerations:Twelve Studies of Indian Literature in English* (1977), *Realism and Reality: Novel and Society in English India* (1985), *Re-reading Jane Austen* (1994), *Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings* (1999), *The Perishable Empire* (2000), and *Early Novels in India* (2002) are some of her important works. She also jointly edited *Another India* with Nissim Ezekiel.

The book *The Perishable Empire* is significant in the context of our discussion because the essay "Anxiety of Indianness," which is in our syllabus, has been taken from this book. Rita Kothari, in her review in *Economic and Political Weekly*, observes that the book "is an interweaving of the current tools of cultural materialism and 19th century colonialism, archival research and trenchant analysis" (2135). In this book, Mukherjee evaluates the complex and evolving relationship between English and India through

literary texts that emerged out of the interaction between the two. The time span of this intercourse is stretched from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the millennium. The book investigates the socio-politico-economic condition of the emergence of the English writing in India. It records the movement of the genre "from days of obscurity to an overwhelming presence today" (Kothari 2135). In the next segments, we are going to analyse the seminal essay, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English" which is, as we have stated earlier, taken from this book.

Activities:

1. Prepare a list of works written by Meenakshi Mukherjee. Check whether all her important works have been mentioned in this unit.
2. Prepare a list of some important critics who have contributed to the development of Indian English literature as a distinct genre. Name at least two important works written by them.
3. Try to figure out what you mean by 'Indianness.' Is it an attempt to essentialise/ homogenise different Indian identities?
4. Note down the points that establish Meenakshi Mukherjee as a postcolonial critic.

6.19.4 Summary of "Anxiety of Indianness"

In her influential essay "The Anxiety of Indianness," which is divided into six sections, Meenakshi Mukherjee offers a scholarly treatment of a literary 'malady' that severely affects the issue of identity in Indian writings in English. She diagnoses this malady as 'anxiety of Indianness.' It is very much evident in Indian English writings but, interestingly, cannot be found in Bhasha literatures. This is an interesting phenomenon that requires a thorough critical understanding. Mukherjee tries to do so in her essay. In order to do this, she adopts a comparative frame of analysis. She juxtaposes Indian writings in English with literary works from Bhasha literatures (the term means literatures written in other Indian languages like Bangla, Marathi or Hindi). Mukherjee observes that a Marathi novelist is not called 'an Indian writer in Marathi,' but a writer writing in English is generally addressed as an 'Indian writer in English.' The insertion of the word 'English' is rather problematic and needs to be pondered over. The writers in Bhasha literatures are more concerned with representing the social reality which surrounds them. They portray this reality with minute details. The places and characters are usually local and they are objectively presented. But the Indian writings in English appear to be self-conscious attempts to flaunt Indianness. Indian English novelists like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand project a pan-Indian reality. They homogenise their nation and their people. Here the English as a language plays on the mind of the Indian creative and critical writers. This anxiety was first mentioned by Raja Rao in the Foreword to his

own novel *Kanthapura* (1938). The issue of 'Indianness' becomes "a favourite essentializing obsession" for the writers. The reviewers and critics too continue to prove that English was, and still continues to be, the language of power and prestige. Creative writers in English still bear "the larger burden of culture, tradition and civilization" (Mukherjee 168). Mukherjee also focuses on the post-colonial diasporic writers who do not cease to write about their nation. But Mukherjee also hopes that genuine writers still do not fall into the trap of homogenising tendency and maintain their distinct individualities in their writings. In his inimitable post-modernist style, Salman Rushdie, for example, depicts the fragmentariness of Indian reality and the falling images of a diverse, multi-layered India. Some of the new writers in Indian English also do not homogenise the nation and speak of places and people in terms of concrete details. They do not have any faith in the East/West binary and speak of other countries/nations in Asia and Africa. Two contemporary novelists whom Mukherjee praises in particular are Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*) and Amitav Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*).

Activities:

1. How would you define 'Bhasha literature'? Make your own enquiry and find out how the term developed. In this respect read note no. 3 of Mukherjee's essay (page no. 185).
2. Does the question of target readers play an important role in the literary representations in English?
3. Collect Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*, read the Foreword (if not the novel), and write down the main points stated there.
4. Prepare a catalogue of Indian English novelists mentioned by Mukherjee in the essay. Take note of what she says about each of them.
5. Prepare a list of authors and works written in Bhasha literatures mentioned by Mukherjee and write down the points she mentions about them.

6.19.5 Critical Understanding of the Text

In "The Anxiety of Indianness" Mukherjee concentrates on a trend symptomatic in the literary works, mainly novels, written by Indian writers in English. She diagnoses this symptom as 'anxiety of Indianness.' She investigates into its causes, and even suggests remedy for this malady.

The *Time* magazine calls the contemporary Indian English writers "the new makers of World Fiction," because, though they write about India, their target readership spans across the continents. And it is the setting of this target readership that contains the crux of the "anxiety" of the Indian English writers. The obsessive concern for Indianness in

Indian English novelists was first clearly articulated by the celebrated novelist Raja Rao in his three-paragraph foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*. (Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, as you know, are the three pioneering figures of Indian English novels.). In the Foreword, Rao explains the dilemma he himself had experienced:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey *in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own*. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of *our intellectual make-up*, like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of *our emotional make-up*. (qtd. in Mukherjee 167; emphases added)

If you read the extract carefully, you will find that Rao is here speaking from his own experience. He finds that Indian authors inevitably experience a gap between two languages/ cultures. The 'thought movements' one has are moulded by one's own cultural background and upbringing. These are often at odds with the medium of expression if it is an 'alien' one. English is an 'alien' language and yet, curiously, it is not an 'alien' one. It occupies a unique, and problematic, status in India. It had been the coloniser's language for a long time, but we have appropriated it for our purposes. It is the language of power, yet a large part of Indians do not have proper access to it. It is one of the Indian languages now, yet its idiom is different from those of the Indian languages. It was more so when the earlier Indian English authors had been writing in the heydays of colonialism. The gap therefore remains between 'our emotional make-up' (which results in the 'thought movement) and 'our intellectual make-up' (which leads to the act of writing). The Indian authors in English are, therefore, the children of a bi-cultural environment. Mukherjee claims that Rao, who diagnosed the anxiety quite perfectly, tried to negotiate the contesting claims of language and culture. She states clearly that such an exercise of writing in English by an Indian is a "bicultural act." It involves a meeting between Indian cultures (reflected through themes) and a foreign culture (mainly expressed through the English language). Rao, according to Mukherjee, is speaking of the fact that the Indian English writers pollinate "English, the intellectually acquired language of formal discussions," with memory, myth and oral traditions (167). This generic experimentation challenges the prevalent narrative modes of Western Europe in the 1930s. Rao's own experimentation of inflecting the English language with Kannada idiom and 'thought movements' is noteworthy in this respect. Sisir Chatterjee argues that "[a]ll these narrative devices and strategies adopted by Raja Rao are merely the symptoms of his 'anxiety of Indianness'" (6). He feels that this anxiety relates to how to present to the author's English-knowing target audience, spread all over the world, the essential spirit of Indian culture in English.

Hence, what Mukherjee argues is that the "anxiety" is created when one tries to capture the quintessential spirit of India in an 'alien' medium of expression. Therefore, Mukherjee's argument implies that the root cause of the "anxiety" is the choice of language, which in turn, results from the desire to reach out to a wider audience outside the periphery of the native languages and, by extension, the national readership. In the diasporic writers this anxiety is notably present. Most of such writers have either never lived in India (like V. S. Naipaul) or have not been in the country for a long time (like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more). Still, these writers get involved with India and Indian themes. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London to Bengali parents, grew up in Rhode Island (USA), studied at Boston University, lived in America. She now lives mostly in Italy and divides her time between the two countries. Naipaul's relationship with India is much more complicated as he has only ancestral memory to fall back upon.

6.19.6 Indianness in Indian English Writings and the Bhasha Literatures

Mukherjee argues that in a *Bhasha* novel (written in Marathi or any other Indian language), the author, and the critics (as well as the readers) do not care for a specific "Indianness." It is so because a Bhasha writer does not carry "the larger burden of culture, tradition and civilization" (168). She emphatically observes, "No one would write a doctoral dissertation on the Indianness of a Marathi novel" (168). By contrast, as we have seen, in the case of an Indian English writer, s/he makes the issue of Indianness a favourite essentialising obsession. The principal reason for this is that English is still perceived as a language of power and privilege. And therefore, we find a continual culture clash between the global (English) and the regional (other Indian languages). Thus, Mukherjee offers us another reason for the birth of the "anxiety of Indianness" — the consciousness of writing in a language possessing a place higher in the hierarchy.

This antithetical position between writing in English and writing in any other Indian language is produced by our constructions of some values as well as by the linguistic reach of the works. It matters whether the target readers are 'local' or global. A Bengali, Marathi or Malayalam writer can portray the multi-layered socio-cultural reality and plurality of the geo-political space when the target readers belong to his/her language. The readers would know about "the shades of response, its associative word-play or ironic understatement will evoke in the Malayalam or Marathi readers who are equipped with the keys for decoding these oblique messsages" (172). On the contrary, this specificity is missing in the Indian English writers. The English language allows its users "to operate only within a limited parameter" (Mukherjee 172). Mukherjee even suggests that the

latter are uncertain about their target audience and 'exact constituency' (172). It was a liability for the Indian English novelists to foreground the idea of a composite nation in their fictional works before independence. It was for the alienation factor and elitism of the language/culture that the Indian English novelists "tended to deploy certain thematic or formal devices to tether their texts to indigenous contexts" (170). There was no such commitment on the part of the Bhasha writers. Mukherjee refers to the older generation of Indian novelists in English. All the three pioneering authors (Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan), despite their ideological and technical differences, shared a pan-Indian vision, "an unspoken faith in a distillable Indian reality" (Mukherjee 174). Mukherjee comments, "Malgudi is a Hindu upper caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal and immutable" (171). It is different from Maryganj in Phanishwar Renu's Malia *Anchal* (1974) or Purnea in Satinath Bhaduri's *Jagori* (1946). The latter category of works can convey the social differences, cultural heterogeneity and power hierarchy through their portrayal of tribal lives, local castes and sub-castes, and turmoil generated by the caste and sub-caste factors. They reject the generalisations and the simplistic binary of rural-urban. Mukherjee argues:

> I am… merely suggesting that in the English texts of India there may be a greater pull towards a homogenisation of reality, an essentialising of India, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community. (171)

But Mukherjee is also of the opinion that language is seldom a matter of choice. She implies that many Indian writers choose to write in English not because they are lured by the prospect of gaining access "to the literary reproduction system of a world market" but because "they have literary competence only in English" (169). The language becomes congenial to the writer's creative imagination, intellect and educational background. She also enquires into the circumstances that have led to the 'loss of the mother tongue' and compelled them to write their works in English. She does so by analysing the works of R. K. Narayan, one of the three great pioneers of Indian English writing.

6.19.7 Anxiety of Indian English Writers: Generational Perspectives

The effective beginning of Indian English writings, Mukherjee argues, dates back to the 1930s. The fictional writers used various strategies to 'tether their texts to indigenous contexts' and embedded Indianness in their novels. Mukherjee explains:

> Mulk Raj Anand's anger at the class and caste inequities in a hierarchic Hindu society, Bhabani Bhattacharya's exposure of religious charlatanism, Kamala Markandeya's concern with the suffering of the unspecified 'Indian' women— are as much illustrative cases of this anxiety manifested in themes as are the efforts of Raja Rao, G. V. Desani and Sudhin N. Ghose to dismantle the constraints of the

written novel to achieve the meandering freedom of the oral narrative examples in terms of form. (170)

The themes have always been taken from Indian life and simultaneously there have often been attempts to employ new narrative techniques.

Raja Rao deployed in his *Kanthapura* a narrative mode that tries to integrate "myth with history, realism with fabulation" and presented India, blending "oral tales and gossip to capture the daily existence, the quarrels and alliances, the smell and sound of a village... where life is determined not by clock or the Gregorian calendar but by seasonal rhythm" (Mukherjee 167-8). On the other hand, R. K. Narayan's language, narrative technique and subject matter have some special features. Having a steady and wide acceptability both at the popular level and academic platforms, he remains one of the most successful authors in India. He has created Malgudi, a fictional place, as the setting of all his novels and short stories. Malgudi is a typical, quintessential Indian town, representing the very image of a homogenous India. This composite, one-dimensional image of India, devoid of any plurality or conflict, is carefully constructed by Narayan. He presents Malgudi metonymically to represent the Indian nation. It is a space for the "Hindu upper caste pan-India" (Mukherjee 171). The town's exact location is not known. We do not even know which language the people of that town speak. All of the residents of the town belong to a harmonious Indian milieu, which rejects any possibility of differences. Narayan set up a model for the other Indian writers in English to follow. The act of eliminating the cultural differences and individualities paves the way for gaining success outside India as the intricacies of the different Indian cultures cannot be deciphered by an outsider. This tendency of portraying an even-toned, minimalistic India is reflective of the "anxiety of Indianness," that we have discussed earlier. It is this "anxiety," Meenakshi Mukherjee argues, that led Narayan and many other Indian novelists of that period to resort to a portrayal of a composite nation, instead of exploring the differences and the subtleties of the cultural nuances of the Indian society.

Now, the projection of a homogenous national identity involves two imperatives. Mukherjee explains that it needs "an erasure of difference within the border and accentuating the difference with what lies outside" (174). Mukherjee observes that English, being a foreign language, automatically fulfils the first of the two conditions. And consequently, when a homogenous image of the nation is projected, it spontaneously serves as a contrast to the equally homogenous image of the West. It is important to note here, as Mukherjee points out, that the non-western countries in Asia and Africa are seldom mentioned in the whole phenomenon of the East-West bipolarisation until the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth came into the scenario. The contrast does not sharply operate in the subsequent decades. The writers of younger generation usually seek to be a part of a global literary league and are not much interested in maintaining familiarity with the works of the

Indian English writers of older generation or of the *Bhasha* literatures. Yet, paradoxically, they achieve fame on the basis of their relationship with India. Thus, even these writers, most of whom live outside the country, cannot escape the "anxiety of Indianness." Mukherjee comments, rather sarcastically, that "there is no getting away from the burden of India if you want to write in English" (176). She refers to the term "third world cosmopolitans." It was first used by Timothy Brennan in 1989, to represent those, who emerge from a non-western culture, but their mastery over the current idiom of 'metropolitan meta-language' of narrative makes them 'authentic' voices of the 'Third World' in the global centres of publication and criticism. The diasporic Indian English fiction writers perfectly fit into this category. As Mukherjee further explains, they highlight the experience of colonialism as the theme or metaphor, unlike the authors from the Bhasha literatures. Very few of the major works of fiction in other Indian languages deal with colonialism any longer. This can be the very reason, Mukherjee points out, why the Bhasha novels, even when translated in English, do not get attention of the western academia. Many forms of internal and external dislocation, rootlessness, cultural hybridity are privileged in a cosmopolitan writer's fiction. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian novelists were keen to be rooted in Indian culture, as it was a matter of identity for them. But today, 'Indianness' seems to be a metaphor or symbol to them to deal with. While writers like Michael On daatje describes his characters as "international bastards, born in one place, choosing to live elsewhere," Bharati Mukherjee celebrates her mixed heritage by suggesting that 'Indianness' is now a metaphor, "a particular way of comprehending the world" (qtd. in Mukherjee 181). But the fact remains that the treatment of India as a 'discursive space' can only be expected from an Indian English writer. Bhasha novelists do not consider Indianness as a metaphor. It is too real for them. Thus, it can be said that the literary imperialism of the Western academic establishment gives birth to a new kind of "anxiety" that drives the Indian English novelists to cater to a pre-determined package for winning global recognition. This endemically infects the Indian writers in English.

Mukherjee mentions the prominent Indian English novelist, Salman Rushdie, who opened a new vista for the younger generation by expanding the scope of the novelist. The liberating influence of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has inspired the new Indian English novelists to explore India as a discursive space. It has challenged the previous hierarchy and helped them to earn a place in world literature which was earlier reserved for the British authors only. Mukherjee, by analysing *Midnight's Children*, shows us how Rushdie refuses to conform to the conventional assumptions about narrative mode and national history. Discarding the centre-periphery paradigm, "in a typically post-modernist fashion, he perceives an India under the threat of fragmentation and disintegration" (Chatterjee 24). The novel is very much open to different kinds of readings. Mukherjee opines that

it can be read as a novel where the abundant multiplicity of India is threatened by the forces inimical to diversity and differences.

> Images of mutilation and holes pervades the novel, beginning with the perforated sheet through which the doctor was permitted to examine the female patient, anticipating the many partial views of reality the novel would play with, and going on to show the country splitting up amoeba-like first into two and then more pieces. (Mukherjee 176-77)

In the novel, the image of India is represented through the interesting metaphor of the All-India radio which used to broadcast programmes in all its different languages, projecting multiple ethnic and religious identities. By contrast, Doordarshan in its early days represented only the dominant culture and official languages. Mukherjee thinks that *Midnight's Children* also attempts to construct the idea of an inclusive and tolerant India (though in an entirely different way). She also admits that the novel seeks to emancipate the Indian English novelists in English from the "anxiety" of presenting an image of a composite, homogenised nation. But while the "anxiety of Indianness" is demolished, another emerges. Mukherjee elaborates that there is, quite surprisingly, a sudden spurt of enthusiasm to appreciate the new Indian English writers, especially among the Bengali academia, partly because many of the new writers are of Bengali origin. Now, this enthusiasm will inspire the writers to write in English about India, as it brings recognition both at home and abroad, which, in turn, creates an unspoken compulsion among the new generation of the Indian English writers to fall prey to the "anxiety of Indianness."

Referring to Aijaz Ahmad, Mukherjee points out that "even in India there seems to be developing a new urban culture for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document. All else is regional, hence minor and forgettable" (182). Her argument is validated by the fact that the newspapers and journals refer to the new Indian novels in English as the "New Indian Novel," almost denying the contribution and existence of the Bhasha literatures. Mukherjee, echoing G. N. Devy's use of the term, calls this literary elitism as a kind of 'amnesia'—amnesia about the other Indian languages which have a long history and a larger numerical presence. But Mukherjee also mentions of those 'genuine' writers who refuses to fall into predictable models. In order to explain further, she cites the example of Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh. Mukherjee claims that their fictional works are marked not by any anxiety but by a confident individuality. To illustrate this point, Mukherjee cites the example of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* which becomes a best seller on terms entirely set by the author, and not the publisher or the market. That Seth's novel is deeply rooted in Indian culture is proved by the fact that it yields to an astounding translation into Hindi (*Koi Achchasa Ladka*). Even though it is written in English, it successfully captures the linguistic diversity of Indian life. Mukherjee also shows the example of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and comments that it betrays no

'anxiety,' as it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalising India. Towards the end of the essay, she prescribes a remedy to cure the 'anxiety.' That remedy is resistance to the lures of global market pressures. She suggests that one has to resist the temptation of the global market and perceive the cities, the languages, the cultures, the 'Indianness' not as a metaphor, but as concrete, real phenomenon. Only then, the 'anxiety' of being an Indian will transform into strength.

Activities

1. "The 'tradition' of Indian writing in English is discontinuous" – Analyse.
2. What does Mukherjee mean by 'reversal of centre-periphery paradigm' in English literary culture?
3. What role does colonialism and globalisation play in creating the 'anxiety of Indianness' in Indian English writers?

6.19.8 Summing Up

The English Education Act of 1835, based on Macaulay's minute, made the Indians realise the 'cultural inferiority' of the native culture and the education system against the supposed superiority of the Western knowledge system. The epigraph of Meenakshi Mukherjee's book *The Perishable Empire* refers to the infamous minute of Macaulay, which foresees an imperishable empire of British art and culture in India. Whether it perishes or not is a matter of debate. What remains imperishable, however, is the English language, which has now become an inseparable part of Indian culture and literature. In "The Anxiety of Indianness," Meenakshi Mukherjee carefully compares the performance and reception of the Indian writings in English and Bhahsa literatures. She raises the crucial issues of Indianness which becomes an obsession with the Indian English novelists. Satish C. Aikant, who has reviewed Mukherje's book, observes that since the global market demands, there is a greater pull for the homogenisation of cultures in most Indian English. A penchant for presenting an undifferentiated India is all too evident. In the present-day scenario, the writers are subjected to the pressure of a global market economy. On the one hand, s/he wants to be rooted in her/his indigenous culture; on the other hand, s/he wants to be part of the cosmopolitan crowd. This conflict—this "anxiety of Indianness" -affects the Indian English writers. But genuine artists transcend this 'anxiety' and stamp their works with their own distinctive personalities.

6.19.9 Self-Assessment Questions

Long-Answer Type Questions

1. Discuss the different situations from which an Indian writer's "anxiety" arises. Comment on the role of the language s/he chooses in this context.

2. Analyse the essay "The Anxiety of Indianness" from the postcolonial prespectives.
3. Analyse the characteristics of 'Indianness' evident in the Indian English literature of the colonial period and the Indian English literature of the post-colonial period.

Mid-length-answer Type Questions

1. Show how Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were 'victims' of 'anxiety of Indianness.'
2. Discuss how Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh evaded 'anxiety of Indianness' in their works.
3. Elaborate how globalised market forces determine the nature of literary works.

Short-Answer Type Questions

1. Why does Mukherjee 'single out' Raja Rao for discussion?
2. What does Mukherjee say about *Desh*, a Bengali magazine?
3. Define the term 'Third World Cosmopolitans' as used by Timothy Brennon? Who belongs to the category?
4. Comment on the Methwold episode in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

6.19.10 Suggested Readings

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Notes

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