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KARAIKUDI – 630 003



Directorate of Distance Education

B.A. [English]

VI - Semester

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INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION

NOTES

Indian English literature (IEL) defines the body of work by Indian writers who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Indian writing in English has a relatively short but highly charged history. In 1793, Sake Dean Mahomed wrote perhaps the first book by an Indian in English, called *The Travels of Dean Mahomed*. However, most early Indian writing in English was usually non-fictional work, such as biographies and political essays.

English, in its classical form was used by writers of the past like Raja Rao, Nirad C. Choudhuri, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. The 1980s and 90s saw a renaissance of Indian writing in English spearheaded by Salman Rushdie with his path breaking work *Midnight's Children*. In the present day, Indian English literature has been associated with the works of the members of the Indian diaspora which include Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, who are of Indian descent. Indian authors have long since carved a niche for themselves in the minds of readers worldwide. With their uniquely Indian style of writing characterized by satirical descriptions of their land, fluidity of language and a melancholy vibe, writers from the far eastern subcontinent are adored by critics and the common populace alike.

This book, *Indian Writing in English*, has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

BLOCK - I
POETRY

*Sri Aurobindo: The Fear
of Life and Death*

UNIT 1 SIR AUROBINDO:
THE FEAR OF LIFE
AND DEATH

NOTES

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 About the Author
- 1.3 *The Fear of Life and Death*: Critical Analysis
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo, poet was widely known for his stance on spirituality and his participation in the Indian freedom struggle. Educated in London, Sri Aurobindo showed a penchant for Latin, History, French, Geography and Arithmetic. He returned to his homeland in 1893 as he started working for the Baroda State Service. In India, he actively took part in the Non-Cooperation Movement. The poem *The Fear of Life and Death* espouses Aurobindo's spiritual concerns as he deals with the theme of death. This unit will discuss the life of Sri Aurobindo and his poem *The Fear of Life and Death*.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the early life of Sri Aurobindo
- Examine Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the Indian freedom struggle
- Critically analyse the poem *The Fear of Life and Death*

1.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 in Konnagar, a village in the Hoogly District, West Bengal. Both his parents were members of the Brahmo Samaj. His

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father believed that British culture was superior and so he was brought up learning to speak English, though he did speak Hindustani at home. His schooling took place at Loreto House, a boarding school in Darjeeling. The city was a centre of British life in the country at this time. Sri Aurobindo went to England where he learnt Latin, History, French, Geography and Arithmetic from Rev. W. H. Drewett. Letters between the father and son indicate that it was during this time that the latter began developing a new understanding of British rule in India, even calling it a 'heartless government' at one point.

When Drewett immigrated to Australia in 1884, Aurobindo and his brothers moved to London to live with his mother. The same year Aurobindo and his brother Manmohan joined St Paul's School where the writer learnt Greek, English literature and became familiar with German and Italian. During his time with Drewett's mother, Aurobindo was exposed to religious teachings which convinced him that he was an atheist. Later on, he came to see himself as an agnostic.

Aurobindo and his brothers had to live at the Liberal Club in South Kensington after his father started experiencing financial difficulties. The secretary of the club was James Cotton, who was the brother of their father's friend in the Bengal ICS, Henry Cotton.

Aurobindo gained admission to King's College, Cambridge under the recommendation of Oscar Browning. He studied for the Indian Civil Service for two years. Since he was only applying for the ICS at the insistence of his father and had no personal desire to join the service, he purposefully arrived at the venue late. As a result, he was disqualified.

Cotton secured a position for Aurobindo in the Baroda State Service after arranging for the young man to meet the Maharaja of Baroda who was in England at the time. Aurobindo left for his homeland and joined the Baroda State Service in 1893. He began his stint in the Survey and Settlements Department before moving to the Revenue Department and finally to the Secretariat. Here, he performed a variety of tasks like teaching grammar. One important task here was writing speeches for the Maharaja of Gaekwad until 1897. In 1897 he began working as a part-time French teacher in Baroda College and was later promoted to the post of Vice-Principal.

It was during his stay in Baroda that Sri Aurobindo began taking an interest in local and national politics and the freedom struggle. As a result he established contacts with groups in Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and with leaders like Lokmanya Tilak and Sister Nivedita. Though he visited Calcutta sporadically, he finally moved to the city in 1906 after the announcement of the Partition of Bengal. His vast reading had familiarized him with the resistance movements in France, America and Italy. Though he publicly advocated support of a peaceful freedom movement as espoused under the Non-Cooperation movement, he also supported revolutionary activity in secret as he was anticipating a situation where the peaceful movements failed to achieve their objectives. The consequences of these beliefs

were the establishment of a series of youth clubs like the Anushilan Samiti, Calcutta in 1902. He participated in the 1906 Congress Meet as a councilor. Here he played a pivotal role in forming the fourfold objectives of ‘Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education’. After the split of the Congress in 1907, he supported Tilak and travelled extensively in Western India, giving speeches and drumming up support for Tilak’s views. He was arrested in 1908 (and later acquitted) in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case. He was released a year later. On his release he started two new publications *Karmayogin* (English) and *Dharma* (Bengali). His famous ‘Uttarpara Speech’ delivered around this time hinted at his growing spirituality. He finally moved to Pondicherry in 1910, though the British Secret Police continued to monitor his activities.

Aurobindo’s experiences in jail proved pivotal in his turn towards spirituality and he turned his focus beyond the freedom of the nation. In his autobiographical notes, he charts this movement from the moment he stepped foot on the homeland after his years in England. One can trace his increasing spirituality to his familiarity with Yoga, first as a bumbling attempt and later under the tutelage of Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. It was Lele who convinced Aurobindo that only his inner guide was necessary and any external guru was superfluous. His years in Pondicherry are focused primarily on his increasing involvement in Yoga. In 1914, he began the monthly philosophical magazine *Arya*. He also went on to write works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, etc. during this time. His increasing following during this period led to the formation and establishment of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926. He also began referring to himself as Sri Aurobindo from this time onwards. His primary literary output from this period is in the form of letters and notes he wrote to his followers or scribbled on papers they had sent asking spiritual questions and the practical aspect of his teachings. He vehemently opposed the Partition of India and stated that the ‘Nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled, or as anything more than a temporary expedient.’ He died on 5 December 1950.

*Sri Aurobindo: The Fear
of Life and Death*

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1.3 THE FEAR OF LIFE AND DEATH: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

*Death wanders through our lives at will, sweet Death
Is busy with each intake of our breath.
Why do you fear her? Lo, her laughing face
All rosy with the light of jocund grace!
A kind and lovely maiden culling flowers
In a sweet garden fresh with vernal showers,
This is the thing you fear, young portress bright
Who opens to our souls the worlds of light.*

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*Is it because the twisted stem must feel
Pain when the tenderest hands its glory steal?
Is it because the flowerless stalk droops dull
And ghastly now that was so beautiful?
Or is it the opening portal's horrid jar
That shakes you, feeble souls of courage bare?
Death is but changing of our robes to wait
In wedding garments at the Eternal's gate.*

The poem consists of a quatrain (four lines) and a couplet (two lines) and the rhyme scheme is ababcc. The poem tries to reconcile the apparently opposites state of 'life' and 'death'.

The chiastic structure of the opening line both belies and underlines the central idea of the poem. This structure is found in ancient literature wherein ideas are placed in opposing symmetric patterns. This arrangement aims to signify to the reader the central idea that the themes being discussed are closely associated with each other but lie on opposite sides of signification. In this poem, the ideas of life and death are similarly placed. Both are in direct opposition to each other since it is impossible for anyone to occupy both states simultaneously. However, they are deeply connected to each other: it is impossible to have one without the other.

Sri Aurobindo's poems are philosophical deep dives into the nature of existence. He attempts to apprise the reader of the nature of life. According to him death is a part of life. Contrary to popular fear of death, he says that one should embrace death. He says that death is a constant companion of every being on earth. The poet argues that man's mortality faces him in every breath that he takes. Just because one is not aware of it does not mean that it does not exist. Children and youth are so engrossed in life and the new experiences they have every moment that it never occurs to them that they might die. They never even think of Death, and even if they do they feel it comes only to the very old and the incapacitated. Thus the fear of Death is something that bothers only the old. But, the poet says that contrary to this, Death shadows every step and every breath that a man takes from the moment he is born.

The poet addresses these young men and argues that fearing death is like fearing the young, nubile woman that they love. He reminds them that it is their attraction for the young woman, her physical charms, her actions and her voice that attracts them and bring them to her again and again. In other words, if a man never falls in love and feels deeply for someone outside of himself his life has no meaning. Loving someone makes one vulnerable to heartbreak and pain. Even as the probability of living a life surrounded with love and happiness opens up before the young as they fall in love; similarly the possibility that their emotions are not reciprocated remain. The loss of face and peace of mind therefore is ever-present. However, the poet raises a pertinent question: does this stop the youth from falling in love? In this sense, he suggests that pain is a part of love. In fact he goes further

and suggests that one can only truly appreciate love and the happiness it brings if one has felt the sorrow of heartbreak. The possibility of loss makes one appreciate what one has more than no experience of this loss ever could. In other words, loss enhances one's ability to feel and enjoy life.

*Sri Aurobindo: The Fear
of Life and Death*

The poet takes this argument forward and suggests that just because the one you love has grown old and frail, the emotion does not cease to exist. In other words, the poet emphasizes the primacy of emotion over the physical body that experiences it. This connects with the idea of the soul and its merging with the eternal being in death. Every interaction that man has while he is alive is a preparation for the eternal love and relationship the soul shares with the creator. In fact the poet picks up on the idea of viewing the body as a garment and develops on the idea. According to him, the body is fated to grow old and decay. He compares it to a new garment. When a garment is first bought it is new, shiny and in shape. It presents the wearer to the best possible advantage in front of others. However, as the garment is worn and washed, it becomes frayed and faded. Soon a point comes when the wearer has no other option but to throw it and put on another one. Thus, the garment and the wearer have a temporary relationship, no matter how good and attractive the garment is. Similarly, he says that the body is a garment that the soul puts on in its journey through life. Like, a new garment, a new, young nubile body is attractive and immerses itself into the joys of life. While it is true that without the body the soul cannot experience the world, nonetheless there is more to the soul than these experiences. They are simply a medium to understand the true significance of life. If one spends one's life merely running after material comforts, their life is wasted.

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In this poem, Sri Aurobindo picks up on the central idea of the primacy of the atma and its relationship with the paramatma. The poet encourages interaction and engagement with one's worldly responsibilities. However, he wishes to remind the reader that these are transient at best. Even as the individual performs his roles and responsibilities he needs to stay true to his humanity and not succumb to temptations and moral depravity.

Check Your Progress

1. Who exposed Sri Aurobindo to religious teachings in London?
2. Who secured a position for Aurobindo in the Baroda State Service?
3. In which year was Aurobindo arrested in connection with the Alipore bomb case?
4. Name the two publications started by Aurobindo after being released from jail.
5. In which year was the Sri Aurobindo Ashram established?
6. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem *The Fear of Life and Death*?

1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

NOTES

1. Rev. W. H. Drewett's mother exposed Sri Aurobindo to religious teachings during his stay in London.
2. James Cotton secured a position for Aurobindo in the Baroda State Service.
3. Aurobindo was arrested in 1908 (and later acquitted) in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case.
4. On his release from jail, Aurobindo started two new publications *Karamyogin* (English) and *Dharma* (Bengali).
5. Sri Aurobindo Ashram was established in 1926.
6. The *The Fear of Life and Death* consists of a quatrain (four lines) and a couplet (two lines) and the rhyme scheme is ababcc.

1.5 SUMMARY

- Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 in Konnagar, a village in the Hoogly District, West Bengal. Both his parents were members of the Brahmo Samaj. His father believed that British culture was superior and so he was bought up learning to speak English, though he did speak Hindustani at home.
- Sri Aurobindo went to England where he learnt Latin, history, French, Geography and arithmetic from Rev. W. H. Drewett. Aurobindo gained admission to King's College, Cambridge under the recommendation of Oscar Browning. He studied for the Indian Civil Service for two years. Since he was only applying for the ICS at the insistence of his father and had no personal desire to join the service, he purposefully arrived at the venue late. As a result, he was disqualified.
- James Cotton secured a position for Aurobindo in the Baroda State Service after arranging for the young man to meet the Maharaja of Baroda who was in England at the time. Aurobindo left for his homeland and joined the Baroda State Service in 1893.
- It was during his stay in Baroda that Sri Aurobindo began taking an interest in local and national politics and the freedom struggle. As a result he established contacts with groups in Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and with leaders like Lokmanya Tilak and Sister Nivedita. Though he visited Calcutta sporadically, he finally moved to the city in 1906 after the announcement of the Partition of Bengal.
- Sri Aurobindo participated in the 1906 Congress Meet as a councilor. Here he played a pivotal role in forming the fourfold objectives of 'Swaraj,

Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education’. He was arrested in 1908 (and later acquitted) in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case. He was released a year later. On his release he started two new publications Karamyogin (English) and Dharma (Bengali).

*Sri Aurobindo: The Fear
of Life and Death*

- Aurobindo’s experiences in jail proved pivotal in his turn towards spirituality and he turned his focus beyond the freedom of the nation. In his autobiographical notes, he charts this movement from the moment he stepped foot on the homeland after his years in England. One can trace his increasing spirituality to his familiarity with Yoga, first as a bumbling attempt and later under the tutelage of Vishnu Bhaskar Lele.
- In 1914, Sri Aurobindo began the monthly philosophical magazine Arya. He also went on to write works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, etc. during this time. His increasing following during this period led to the formation and establishment of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926.
- The poem *The Fear of Life and Death* consists of a quatrain (four lines) and a couplet (two lines) and the rhyme scheme is ababcc. The poem tries to reconcile the apparently opposites state of ‘life’ and ‘death’.
- Sri Aurobindo’s poems are philosophical deep dives into the nature of existence. He attempts to apprise the reader of the nature of life. According to him death is a part of life. Contrary to popular fear of death, he says that one should embrace death. He says that death is a constant companion of every being on earth.
- Sri Aurobindo suggests that pain is a part of love. In fact he goes further and suggests that one can only truly appreciate love and the happiness it brings if one has felt the sorrow of heartbreak.
- In *The Fear of Life and Death*, Sri Aurobindo picks up on the central idea of the primacy of the atma and its relationship with the parmatma. The poet encourages interaction and engagement with one’s worldly responsibilities. However, he wishes to remind the reader that these are transient at best. Even as the individual performs his roles and responsibilities he needs to stay true to his humanity and not succumb to temptations and moral depravity.

NOTES

1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Non-Cooperation movement:** It was launched on 4 September 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi with the aim of self-governance and obtaining full independence from the British rule. It was a large scale civil disobedience movement in India.
- **Quatrain:** It is a stanza in a poem that has exactly four lines.
- **Rhyme scheme:** It is the pattern of rhymes at the end of each line of a poem or song.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief sketch of Sri Aurobindo's turn to spirituality.
2. Mention some of the philosophical works written by Sri Aurobindo.
3. Write a short note on the theme of death as explored in the poem *The Fear of Life and Death*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the early life of Sri Aurobindo and his participation in the Indian national struggle.
2. Critically analyse the poem *The Fear of Life and Death*.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 RABINDRANATH TAGORE: *WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR*

Rabindranath Tagore:
*Where the Mind is
Without Fear*

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- 2.1 Objectives
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2.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit provides a critique of the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*, written by renowned Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The unit provides an extensive knowledge about the poet and his life. An understanding of the political as well as the national fervour prevalent at the time in which Tagore was writing makes the poem comprehensive as well as easy to relate to. The poem beautifully captures the emotions that engulfed people during the Indian freedom struggle. This unit will discuss the literary career of Tagore and provide a critical analysis of the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the literary career of Rabindranath Tagore
- Examine the themes found in Tagore's poetry
- Critically analyse the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*

2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 and was also known by the sobriquet Gurudev. He was a Bengali polymath and reshaped Bengali literature and music. His father Debendranath played a key role in the Bengali renaissance. The Tagores

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were Bengali Brahmins who settled in the region situated on the right bank of the river Hoogly. He wrote many poems, novels, short stories and essays. Tagore is best remembered in history for writing the Indian national anthem. He also coined the title Mahatma for Indian nationalist leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

There are many Bengali critics who constantly remind us that there are two Tagores - one, the Bengali poet and second, his alter ego, Tagore in translation. However, the Bengali poet is far greater in tone, texture and spirit than the Indo-English poet. Tagore was not only a poet in his mother tongue but a gifted composer and a remarkable musician. Tagore, it seems, never composed his words in conformity with musical rhythm. He wrote songs in accordance with the rhythm of poetry and because of this, he had to create many new metres in the course of composing songs.

For instance, a few lines from his well-known song from *Gitanjali* (No. II) are as follows: 'Leave this chanting and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?'

Bhajan Poojan Saadhan aaraadhan

Samasta thak padhe

Rudhadwaare devaalayer kone

Kena aacchis ore...

It is not only the language and the rhythm that get changed, the images and the tone changes as well. Tagore himself had called most of his own translations, transactions. Let us take the well-known first poem of *Gitanjali*:

Thou hast made me endless

Such is thy pleasure

In the original poem the key word is 'lila'. It is the Upanishadic concept of creation as God's 'sport'. But the corresponding English word is 'pleasure', too weak to express the idea of 'cosmic lila'. But 'pleasure' has the advantage of being Biblical and hence, more comprehensible to the European audience.

At the time when *Gitanjali* received the Nobel Prize, the non-Bengalis did not know that the *Gitanjali* was actually a selection from ten different volumes and that the poems were composed in varying moods and in different frames of mind. Yet, they were accused of monotony by some critics. It was the undercurrent of religious feelings that made them look somewhat similar. There was in them, a thirst for far off things, an un-frenzied fervour for the other worldly experiences. The European admirers were swept off their feet by those poems because they appeared to be so different from the run of Georgian English poetry. W B Yeats says in his famous Foreword: 'We had known that we had loved God, hardly it may be that we believed in Him; yet looking backward upon our life we discover, in our delight in the lonely places of hills, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness'. C F Andrews listening to the poems could not control his tears. He has confessed, he rolled in ecstasy on the lawns of Hampstead Heath muttering to

himself the unforgettable lines, 'On the Seashore of endless worlds children meet'. Those were the poems that made A.C. Bradley exclaim: 'It looks as though we have another great poet among us'. Those were the poems that made Nobel laureate Per Hallström wonder whether it is appropriate to associate a monetary prize, with such divine poems. He said it is like paying for the song of the Psalms.

Tagore himself was a little surprised at the unexpected encomiums showered on him. For a while he asked himself 'Are they kidding me, or are they just being good mannered?' It took some time for the poet to accept their compliments in good faith.

Most Indian readers of Tagore are familiar only with *Gitanjali* and they hurriedly conclude that Tagore is all mysticism. Was he nothing if not mystical? The word mysticism when applied to poetry is as enigmatic as the concept itself to put the idea in a nutshell, mysticism is an intuitive apprehension of the divine presence. It is emotional, not intellectual. It is 'dhyana gamyam' not jnana gamyam'. Tagore's early upbringing and his Brahmo training were conducive to a sort of divine ecstasy.

Every year his father used to take him to the sylvan surroundings of Bolpur where the young poet lost himself in communion with Mother Nature. The poet says:

'In the mornings every now and then a kind of unspeakable joy, without any cause used to overflow my heart. A singular glory covered the entire universe for me - bliss and beauty seemed to ripple all over the world.'

The tone in *Gitanjali* is supplicatory, the dialogue almost continuous and intimate. Even death comes as a soothing finale to life. Images such as 'handing over the keys', or 'garland is ready for the bridegroom' have a sobering effect on the mind of the reader. When God is conceived as 'purusha' the devotee has got to become feminine for the proper emotional rapport as the coy maiden yearning for the divine lover, as in No. 59 (Thy face is bent from above; thy eyes look down on my eyes and my heart has touched thy feet). In No. 84 again:

'It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.'

In No. 42 we find the relation assuming the shape of a clandestine agreement full of romantic bashfulness:

'Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thee and I; and never a soul in the world would know of this, our pilgrimage to no country and to no end Is the time not come yet? Are there- works to do?'

The metaphor which begins on a purely romantic note suddenly takes a twist and swings off into breath-taking spiritual altitudes.

In No. 45 he asks,

'Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes....'

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In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes,
ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, I and it is the
golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.'

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Thus, it can be said that Tagore had a pretty intimate affair with God and it
persisted till the very end.

Nevertheless he had other passions too. Tagore had his share of sorrow. Three of his children and his wife died in quick succession and he realized how painful it was to be lonely and to be devoid of children's precious love. This difficult phase in Tagore's life gave birth to some of the finest lyrics by Tagore. There are many poems of tender waiting for the un-arrived child, and poems on the divine presence of the child. *When and Why* in *The Crescent Moon* is one of the most beautiful poems addressed to the child. An extract of the poem is as follows:

'When I bring you coloured toys, my child. I understand why there is such a
play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints - when
I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance I truly know why there is music in leaves, and
why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth

Tagore's love poems are quite different in their emotional appeal. To him the woman is an eternal mystery, half dream, half reality. She is seldom the sensuous seducer of man. Tagore himself has described his first encounter with a girl with extreme candour. As a young boy of seventeen he was taken to Ahmedabad by his eldest brother Satyen Tagore (I.C.S.). Rabi was soon to go to England for higher studies. It was there that he had his first taste of romance. It was not a case of the boy going after the girl but the reverse. She was a sweet girl of sixteen and she fell head over heels in love with this prince charming. But the prince admits, he could not overcome his bashfulness even to steal a kiss! Yet Tagore reverentially referred to her feelings in some of the finest love lyrics of the language. The heroine appears as Nalini, obviously a pseudonym, in several of his poems. Then there was the protective care his highly emotional sister-in-law gave him. This intimacy was frowned upon by the seniors of the family. And to add to the chaos she committed suicide which left an indelible mark on the poet's mind.

Then there was another fascinating but intense relation with the 34 year old Argentinian feminist and writer Victoria Ocampo when the poet was well past 62. Tagore wrote some beautiful poems about her as well. The dark lady of 'Puravi' is none other than Victoria Ocampo.

Her eyes spoke to me

She will keep me awake

For ever with her sad message.

In spite of all these intimate experiences Tagore's love poems carry the stamp of mystery and wonder.

It is a truism to say that Tagore's genius was the best suited to the lyric form. He has written all kinds of lyrics but he has also written some of the finest narrative poems and dramatic monologues and dialogues such as *Kama and Kunti* and *Kacha and Devayani*. Some of his dramas, particularly the dance dramas (*Chandalika*, *Chitrangada* etc.) are an integral part of his poetry.

One might ask: 'What did he say - if what is said is that important- in all these myriad forms of compositions extending over a period of sixty five years? Was he repeating himself? Or was there a continuous growth?' Poet critic Budhadeva Bose believed that he had reached the climax of his poetic realization with the *Gitanjali* period. But there were others like Abu Sayeed Ayyub who believed that some of the poems of the post-*Gitanjali* period, particularly those written during the last decade of the poet's life, were not only superior in merit, but also expressed a new tragic vision of life.

To many, it is difficult to reconcile his great concern for the social man with his passion for far-off things. But Tagore combines the worldly and the other-worldly in the most natural way. Tagore's yoga was in perfect harmony with the world. 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight', he declared. In the *Sadhana* lectures too, Tagore emphasises the role of Ananda in life. For Tagore, life was God's gift to man to spread the fragrance of beauty and truth. To use the language of Bergson his mysticism was not contemplative but active. He was a humanist par excellence. But his humanism was not born out of scepticism. It was serving God by serving man. It harnessed piety to pity, compassion to creative passion.

Language in *Gitanjali*

Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali anthology *Gitanjali* comprising 156 Bengali poems or songs was published in the Bengali year 1317. The English *Gitanjali* was published in 1912.

Language of some of the lyrics in *Gitanjali* are soaked in paradox. Incidentally, the life of Tagore during the *Gitanjali* phase itself is an example of supreme paradox. In his personal life, this was the most traumatic phase due to the death of his wife Mrinalini, his daughter Renuka and of his father Debendranath and his son Samindra. Still *Gitanjali* is full of songs of ecstasy.

Even the first poem begins with a paradox:

Still thou pourest

And still there is room to fill (Poem 1)

And also ends with a paradox-embedded prayer about sound flowing into silence:

Let all my songs

Gather together their diverse strains

Into a single current and flow to a sea of silence

In one salutation to thee. (Poem 103)

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His language is quite straightforward. There is incomparable fusion of religion and tender love in his poetry like in those of the British metaphysical poet, John Donne. For example in poem no. 96, the speaker's heart brims with joy at the taste of the 'hidden honey of this lotus that expands in the ocean of light'. The ineffable rhapsody is akin to the feeling of a mystic and has naturally taken verbal form as paradox:

'My whole body and my limbs have thrilled
With his touch who is beyond touch' (Poem 96)

Thus we can say that paradox has proved an effective figurative device in forging antithetical ideas. One advantage of paradox is that two apparently unrelated standpoints cohere in a proposition.

The last few poems in *Gitanjali* are about death. Death is depicted not as the end of life but a new beginning. The poet is the least perturbed at the approach of death. He rather woos death as his beloved and prepares to welcome her. In his translation of *Gitanjali*, Tagore has tried to faithfully reproduce the paradox probably because it is a figure of speech based on meaning not on sound. As the language of *Gitanjali* is so saturated with paradox, much of its poetic beauty will certainly escape our notice if we fail to identify the paradoxical matrix of its language.

Nature in Rabindranath Tagore's Poetry

While Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with nature was a continuous motif in his poetry, a small sequence of poems written in 1928 outline his vision of nature as integral to human civilization. Written on the occasion of the Tree Planting Festival (Brikszaropana), Rabindranath places Nature within the framework of myth to remind human civilization about the pitfalls of an indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. These poems (no full translation of which is available yet), chosen from the volume *Banobani* (The Message of the Wild, 1929) stand at crossroads between the literary and the pedagogic, alerting us to the rich nuances of Tagore's nature poetry.

It is worthwhile to point out the human interaction with Nature was a lingering concern for Rabindranath from his very early age. Drawing from the Upanishadic tradition, Tagore saw the presence of the Divine Spirit within all creation manifested within the richness of Nature. This presence was one which was marked by a deep spirit of creative joy whose reflection Rabindranath sought to create within his poetry. In his introduction to *The Message of the Wild* (*Banobani*), Tagore provided an interesting philosophical outline of his approach to Nature:

The language of Nature is the eternal language of creation. It penetrates reality to reach the deepest layers of our consciousness, it draws upon a language that has survived thousands of years with the human it is the musical instrument of nature, it replicates the rhythm inherent in life itself. If we listen carefully we will be able to trace within them the murmurs of eternity where the spirit of liberation, peace and beauty lurk, it reminds us of the sea that *issantam, shivam, advaitam*... it reminds us of our bond with the world if we can accept this music of the wild

within us, we can perceive the great music of oneness in this hotel of Vienna, I thus often fondly remember the flora and the fauna of my household at Santiniketan. ("Introduction", to *Bonobani, Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. 8, 87; author's translation)

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Thus, Tagore's poetry is permeated with every seasonal hue, replete with the flora and the fauna reflecting all possible moods. It is not an exaggeration to surmise that Rabindranath's poems on Nature outnumber those of any other poet in any other language.

There are several features of this Nature poetry that strike us immediately. For Rabindranath, Nature is never a mere backdrop or an inanimate presence. It is breathed with a presence, that the poet is also part of. Proximity with the pantheism of Wordsworth's nature poetry is discernible, but the richness of description and mood is far superior. Moreover, Rabindranath infuses Nature with a joy and vitality that Wordsworth does not display, unless referring to the coarser periods of childhood. Tagore combines the imaginative vitality of Shelley, the richness of Keats' imager, and the detection of an infused spirituality of Wordsworth.

To integrate this spirit of joy and to reiterate the human participation in the creative joy of the spirituality within Nature, Tagore integrated the pedagogic and the poetic. In his experimental school at Santiniketan, he devised a series of festivals that coincided with the change of seasons, celebrating them with poetry, music and dance. The major festival was the Spring Festival that saw the flowing of life, etched in some of Tagore's finest songs:

The doorway to the southerly is open today

Come O spirit of Spring!

In the new greenery and the flowers

In the pollen and the fragrance

Unfurl your dress to the wide open sky.

(Arupratan, 21; author's translation)

Equally important were festivals like *Varshamangal* (Monsoon festival) and the *Pous Utsav* (winter festival) with their own mixture of songs and dance.

What is noticeable here is Rabindranath's consistent attempt to remind his student and fellow human beings of the impact of Nature in their daily existence. Equally important is the consciousness of every individual season bringing the blessings of life and natural plenitude to sustain humanity. Thus, even the dreariness of winter conceals the advent of life:

Rabindranath recognized the need to acknowledge and reiterate Nature as the force that sustains man. Thus, any threat to this could be constructed as a very threat to the basis of civilization. Tagore also recognized that to generate this awareness and respect he required a language of spirituality and deification that would formalize and aestheticize this awareness to inculcate a sense of importance of nature among his fellow citizens and *ashramites*. The poetic, aesthetic,

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environmental and the pedagogic came together within these poems as Tagore wore a mythical presence of Nature within the human.

Tagore's nature poetry is thus marked by a complex intersection of the spiritual, practical and the pedagogic. The sensitive Rabindranath perceived the presence of a spirit that moved in all things within Nature. The creative urge and joy of this spirit permeated his creative consciousness, unleashing a range of poems celebrating the variety within Nature. His creative and pedagogic instincts thus combined to create a series of festivals and poems that could use the aesthetic to remind us of the dependence of human life on the natural and the consequences of neglecting this bond. In this attempt, he developed a distinct formal idiom for these poems that sought to combine the mythical, the joyous and the spiritual. It is this complexity that provides such a density to Tagore's nature poetry.

The Mystic World in Tagore's Songs of Love

The songs of love as Rabindranath Tagore has written bring forth a serene world of consciousness. It is a world where he weaves the thread of love in association with joy, freedom, beauty and wonder. Along with these, he also delineates with languishment, sorrow, hopelessness, awe and admiration. All these components of love are synchronized in such a way as to make room in his muse for an elegant and poignant journey to an exquisite land of mystic awareness.

Admittedly, Tagore expands the world of mystic wonder and fulfilment in his songs of love. He invites the 'All Serene' as a lover of all love and greets him not merely as his lover but also as a friend, guide and crystallizer of all his best intentions and purposes for advancement of mystic vision. He does not want to remain isolated from the worries and agonies of thoughts and emotions because he thinks that these are not constraints but stimulants in devotion to love. And so, he creates in his songs of love, a new horizon of mystic endearment where the lover and the beloved feel the warmth of nearness to each other's mind and heart.

Tagore adorns the mystic muse with love that plays on eternally like the unending music of the flute. He earnestly feels that the tune of the flute of life wanders in all aroma of endless resonance.

Juxtaposition and Imagery

The juxtaposition of ideas and imageries with which Tagore creates the mystic ambience brings forth a picturesque freshness that becomes a living testimony of love. He does not allow any complexity of thoughts and imageries. Nor does he allow the difficult strains of moments to overpower the candid catholicity of mystic vision. Simplicity and straightforwardness are the components that adorn the mystic grandeur of love. The pangs of loneliness and the agony of pain as Tagore depicts in his songs of love create a serene mystic atmosphere. The search for the infinite vision of love gets a new zeal for celebration of sorrow in darkness.

Check Your Progress

1. In which year was the English translation of *Gitanjali* published?
2. What is the tone used in Tagore's *Gitanjali*?
3. Which figure of speech dominates some of the lyrics in *Gitanjali*?

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2.3 *WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR:* CRITICAL ANALYSIS

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

Introduction of the Poem

Where the Mind is Without Fear was included in the volume called *Naibedya*, the original poem bears the title *Prarthna* meaning prayer. The poem is a prayer to God. It was written by Tagore when India was under the British rule and people were eagerly waiting to get freedom from the British rule. This poem strengthened people's faith in the struggle for Indian freedom. This poem is a prayer to Almighty for nation free from the ills such as manipulation and corruption.

Tagore being a patriot and with an inclination towards spirituality had deep religious roots and his work reflects profound humanism. In this poem, Tagore sketches a moving picture of the nation where everyone should be free in the bond of brotherhood. He wishes India to be that nation where everyone's head is held high and one's voice can be heard without having any apprehension or fear of oppression or forced compulsion.

He also talks about a nation where the knowledge is not restricted by narrow ideas. British rule has robbed India of its dignity, pride and reduced it to a ruined nation. Tagore's dream India is a place where her people will always hold their heads high with their pride in knowledge. People should come out of the age old constrictions of caste, creed and religion. In new and free India, people should be totally free from any kind of prejudice and superstitions. India should be a nation

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where only truth prevails and it should ascend from the depths of the heart and truth should speak out courageously in the open world to hear. There should be a voice of reason and logic leaving all prejudices and superstitions behind. In India, everyone should be free to toil and work hard for anything which leads to the success of the nation. Everyone should strive tirelessly till they attain full satisfaction in reaching their goals and destinations.

India should be a nation where reason will lead superstitious beliefs; where people's mind should not dwell in the mistakes of the past. On the other hand, they should be led by the power of reasoning to be focused on future. Tagore's only prayer to the 'Supreme Ultimate' is leading the nation to such an ideal state of heaven. It is only by the universality of this perception and an abiding passion for the realization of great human ideals that India will achieve her true freedom. Only through this way will India realize her destiny.

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is a prayer to a universal father-figure, that is, the God Almighty. The poem is highly inspiring which brings out the poet's vision of free and enlightened India. The poem was originally written in Bengali. It was composed before India's independence, most probably in the year 1900. The original poem titled *Prarthna* was included in an anthology named *Naibedya* and the poem was translated into English by Tagore himself around 1911. The poem features on the thirty-fifth number in the English *Gitanjali* published in 1912. This poem had a very special place in the heart of the poet. He recited its English version at the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta, 1917.

The poem is written in free verse. It is considered to have two sections; the first seven lines with a series of adverbial clauses and the principal clause at the end. We do not know the exact setting and scene which these lines refer to until we come to the concluding line of the poem. Although we can sense that the place referred to is an awe-inspiring, almost an ideal place. It is a utopian setting where all the sublime features such as valour, knowledge, harmony, truth, intellect and advancement prevail.

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

In the principal clause of the sentence, the poet identifies that circumstance, that metaphorical scenario as 'that heaven of freedom' and requests the 'Father', the God Almighty, to let his country to reach there or his country to realize that she ought to endeavour to accomplish the capability to establish all these marvellous lineaments.

Thus, Tagore visualizes an ideal nation which will be liberal in its outlook, united in strength and dynamic in progress. The poet is truly devoted to God and

entreats him that he must direct the poet's fellow men to be industrious, truthful and rational so that they can bring advancement in the country and lead it to the most ideal future. He also prays that his countrymen may attain overall welfare and self-reliance.

Central Idea in *Where the Mind is Without Fear*

The poet was deeply distressed by the rule and dominance of the British imperialistic forces and was dispirited by the loss of pride and dignity of his mother country, India, because of her repression by the British. That is why, Tagore envisages a country where people are given the freedom of body, mind and soul. They should live with pride and dignity. They should not at all give rise to the superstitions and prejudices rather their mind should be focused on the reason which will lead their nation to better future. They should be loyal to their life, and truth should ascend from the depth of their hearts. They should not be constrained by narrow ideas and shallow definitions of loyalty. They should live in self-esteem and their self-respect should not be yielding to their passion. Everyone in his country should have free access to education and education should not be the exclusive right of the aristocrats and the wealthy.

The poet expresses his grief at the situation that the world is broken and human beings are divided on many narrow considerations as social, political, economic, and religious and caste restrictions. He prays that people think beyond the influence of social status, economic circumstances, religious beliefs or doctrine and superstitions and prejudices. Their minds should be infused with the thoughts leading to the success of their nation. Their hearts should be filled with the depth of truth and only words of truth should emerge from the soundness of their hearts so that the whole world pays heed to their words. Each of their action should be in the cause of betterment and upliftment of their nation. Their actions should be led by reason and logic, and not bound by outdated customs and conventions.

They should be goal-oriented and should not be misguided by the barren and sterile beliefs and prejudices. They should have progressive thinking only then they will make their nation strong and advanced. Tagore wants his country to be aware of its potential and possibilities for virtuous action. Finally, he entreats God to guide his country to progress to a heaven of freedom.

Style of the Poem: *Where the Mind is Without Fear*

Rabindranath Tagore has been rightly called India's poet laureate and the great patriot. His magnum opus *Gitanjali* brought laurels to India in 1913 by clinching a Nobel Prize for literature. Critics in Europe and America have bestowed encomiums on his writings and ranked him among the greatest poets of the world. He combines in himself three distinct roles, that of a poet, a philosopher and a patriot. As an ardent patriot, he aspired not only political freedom for his nation but also its liberation from the evils of idleness, cowardice, ignorance, selfishness and superstitions.

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The poem is embedded with a variety of figures of speech. In the poem the word ‘where’ is being repeated in almost all the lines except in the last. This device is known as anaphora, meaning the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses. The poem is also infused with many examples of alliteration which refers to the repeated use of the same consonant sound at the beginning of each word in the line of verse. For example:

‘head held high’

‘where the world’

‘dreary desert sand of dead habit’

‘where words’

In the poem, there is also the use of apostrophe, it refers to the figure of speech in which some absent or non-existent person or thing is addressed as if present and capable of understanding. As in the poem, the poet uses ‘my father, let my country awake’, here, father refers to God.

The poem also has many metaphors. For example, ‘where the clear stream of reason...’

In the above line, the reason has been compared to the clear stream. Personification is also used in the poem. It is a figure of speech in which human characteristics are attributed to an animal or an object or non-human things. For example, ‘where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection’. In this line, tireless striving is an abstract idea which has been assigned with a human aspect.

Check Your Progress

4. What is the structure of the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*?
5. Name the figures of speech used in the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.
6. State an example of alliteration in *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.

2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The English version of *Gitanjali* was published in 1912.
2. The tone in *Gitanjali* is supplicatory, the dialogue is almost continuous and intimate.
3. Paradox has proved to be an effective figurative device in forging antithetical ideas in the lyrics in *Gitanjali*. Language of some of the lyrics in *Gitanjali* are soaked in paradox.

4. The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is written in free verse and consists of just one sentence. It is considered to have two sections: the first seven lines with a series of adverbial clauses and the principal clause at the end.
5. The various figures of speech used in the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* are anaphora, apostrophe, alliteration, metaphor and personification.
6. An example of alliteration in *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is ‘head held high’.

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2.5 SUMMARY

- Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali anthology *Gitanjali* comprising 156 Bengali poems or songs was published in the Bengali year 1317.
- The English *Gitanjali* was published in 1912.
- Mysticism is an intuitive apprehension of the divine presence. It is emotional, not intellectual. It is ‘dhyana gamyam’ not ‘jnana gamyam’.
- The tone in *Gitanjali* is supplicatory, the dialogue almost continuous and intimate. Even death comes as a soothing finale to life. Images such as ‘handing over the keys’, or ‘garland is ready for the bridegroom’ have a sobering effect on the mind of the reader.
- Tagore’s love poems are quite different in their emotional appeal. To him, the woman is an eternal mystery, half dream, half reality.
- Language of some of the lyrics in *Gitanjali* are soaked in paradox.
- There is incomparable fusion of religion and tender love in his poetry like in those of the British metaphysical poet, John Donne.
- While Rabindranath Tagore’s engagement with nature was a continuous motif in his poetry, a small sequence of poems written in 1928 outline his vision of nature as integral to human civilization.
- Tagore’s poetry is permeated with every seasonal hue, replete with the flora and the fauna reflecting all possible moods.
- Tagore’s nature poetry is thus marked by a complex intersection of the spiritual, practical and the pedagogic.
- The juxtaposition of ideas and imageries with which Tagore creates the mystic ambience brings forth a picturesque freshness that becomes a living testimony of love.
- *Where the Mind is Without Fear* was included in the volume called *Naibedya*, the original poem bears the title *Prarthna* meaning prayer.
- The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is a prayer to a universal father-figure, that is, the God Almighty. The poem is highly inspiring which

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brings out the poet's vision of free and enlightened India. The poem was originally written in Bengali.

- The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is written in free verse and consists of just one sentence. It is considered to have two sections: the first seven lines with a series of adverbial clauses and the principal clause at the end.
- Tagore visualizes an ideal nation which will be liberal in its outlook, united in strength and dynamic in progress.
- The poet expresses his grief at the situation that the world is broken and human beings are divided on many narrow considerations as social, political, economic, and religious and caste restrictions.
- The poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear* is embedded with a variety of figures of speech.
- In the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*, the word 'where' is being repeated in almost all the lines except in the last. This device is known as anaphora, meaning the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses.

2.6 KEY WORDS

- **Figure of speech:** It is a form of expression used to convey meaning or heighten effect often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener.
- **Anaphora:** It is the use of a word referring back to a word used earlier in a text or conversation, to avoid repetition.
- **Metaphor:** It is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest likeness or analogy between them.
- **Mysticism:** It is a belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect, may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the impact of Rabindranath Tagore's life on his poetry.
2. How did Nature influence Tagore's writings?
3. Write a short note on the mystic world in Tagore's songs of love.

4. Briefly mention the style and structure of the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.

Rabindranath Tagore:
*Where the Mind is
Without Fear*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse Tagore's poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.
2. Discuss the central theme of the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.
3. Examine the poetic devices employed by the poet in the poem *Where the Mind is Without Fear*.

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2.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 SAROJINI NAIDU: *LOVE AND DEATH*

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Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 About the Author
- 3.3 *Love and Death*: Critical Analysis
- 3.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Sarojini Naidu is known not only for her prolific contribution to poetry, but also for her part in the Indian freedom struggle. Naidu deviated from the Romantic tradition prevalent at the time and introduced native images and symbols in order to present the Indian sensibility in her poems. In this way, she followed in the footsteps of writers like Toru Dutt. Prominent themes in her poems were that of patriotism, love, mysticism, life and death. She also focused on women's issues in her works and worked for the overall upliftment of women. This unit will discuss in detail the life of Sarojini Naidu and then the poem *Life and Death* will be analysed.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the literary career of Sarojini Naidu
- Examine the features and themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry
- Critically analyse the poem *Love and Death*

3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad on 13 February 1879. Her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyay, was a doctor of Science from Edinburgh University. He settled in Hyderabad State where he founded the Ahmedabad College. It was later called the Nizam's College. Sarojini Naidu's mother, Barada Sundari Devi was a Bengali poetess. After completing her matriculation from the University of Madras, Sarojini Naidu continued her education in England, first at King's College, London and

later at Girton College, Cambridge. It was while studying here that she met Edmund Gosse who convinced her that she should stick to Indian themes in her poetry. She followed this advice and depicted contemporary Indian life and events in her poetry. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. While she was in England, Sarojini Naidu met her future husband Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu who was a non-brahmin doctor. They married in 1898. Even though it was an inter-caste marriage, they did not face any opposition; her father approved of the match and it was a happy marriage. They had five children Jayasurya, Padmaja, Randheer, Nilawar and Leelamani.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 inspired Sarojini Naidu to join the Indian National movement. Her interaction with luminaries like Tagore, Gokhale, Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru honed her political beliefs and increased her political activism. She traversed the length and breadth of the country talking about social welfare, women empowerment and nationalism. In fact the years from 1915 to 1918 can be seen as her years of activism. During these years, she successfully garnered the support of Indian women and was instrumental in bringing them out of their homes to participate in the freedom movement in any capacity that they could. She also helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917. Her work was recognized by the British Government which awarded her the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal for her work during the plague in India. She also went to jail along with other leaders like Gandhi and Nehru during the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement.

Sarojini Naidu's accomplishments are legendary. She was one of the framers of the Indian Constitution. She was also the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress as well as the first female governor of Uttar Pradesh. She died in her sleep in the night of 2 March 1949.

Contribution to Indian Poetry

Sarojini Naidu played an important role in the history of Indian literatures in English. When she first started writing poetry, the literary scene was replete with poets who were imitating their British idols. Therefore, the late 19th and early 20th century is replete with an imitation of the Romantic Poetry in both form and matter. Toru Dutt was the one of first Indian poets to use native symbols and images in her poems. She was influenced by the puranas and the culture of ancient India. She interpreted Indian life before the Western world by recapturing the legendary past of India in her verses.

Sarojini Naidu followed in her footsteps. Her poems are rooted in the Indian myths, legends and folklore. Her poetry can be regarded as a mirror of India. She portrayed the customs, traditions, festivals, myths and legends, men and women, flora and fauna, landscape and sky-scape of India through her poems. It was this aspect of her poetry that prompted Edmund Gosse to praise her poetry in the Introduction to *The Bird of Time*. In it he wrote: 'What we wished to receive was not a rechauffe of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some

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revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul'. The fact that this is the case with Sarojini Naidu's poetry is further borne out by A. A. Ansari's praise. According to him, the most characteristic feature of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is its lyrical wealth and the preponderance of a purely Indian character.

Literary Works

Sarojini Naidu was a child prodigy and began writing at the age of 12. *Maher Muneer*, her first play impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. It was written in Persian and is indicative of the wide influences that can be seen in her later works. She was given the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India' for her poetic works. In recognition of her work on women's issues, her birthday is celebrated as Women's Day in India. Her contribution to the field of Indian poetry cannot be doubted. Naidu's reputation as a poet was cemented when *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and earned her the title 'Bulbul-e-Hind'.

Naidu was a virtuoso of English metrical forms and her poetry is replete with romantic imagery. A look at her work reveals her growth as a poetess. She began writing poetry after being influenced by the British models. In her early works, she used English metrical forms and Western themes and images. It was Edmund Gosse who read her work, realized her potential and advised her to incorporate Indian subjects and themes into her work. *The Golden Threshold* is the result. *The Golden Threshold*, her first collection of poems was published in 1905. The book combines traditional poetic forms with images of Indian life. This book was extremely successful and readers adored her deft handling of English as well as her representation of Indian life. Her second volume *The Bird of Time* (1912), deals with the issues of death and grief. Some poems in this volume also give voice to her patriotic and religious beliefs. Gosse, in the foreword of the volume praised Naidu for her skill in exploring complex issues in a delicate romantic language. The dominant note in *The Broken Wing* (1917) is patriotic and she focuses exclusively on the description of Indian culture. This volume contains some of her best poems and was the last volume published in her lifetime. These three volumes occupy a place of eminence in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. In 1918, *Feast of Youth* was published. Later *The Magic Tree*, *The Wizard Mask* and *A Treasury of Poems* also came out. *The Sceptered Flute: Songs of India* (1937) was a collection of the first three volumes of her poetry. *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961) published posthumously, contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu.

Naidu's Work on the Women Question

While Sarojini Naidu worked for the overall upliftment of Indian women, her approach was not confrontational. She was not working along the lines of Western

feminists when they campaigned for 'emancipation.' Instead, her aim was to generate a sense of harmony between the two sexes so that they could co-operate and work together for freedom and progress. She worked on the need for education for women and also protested against social practices that led to discrimination against women. She argued that it was imperative to equip the women with skills and free them from the burden of outdated thoughts. In the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress in 1917, she declared: 'Womanhood of India stands by you today. When your hour strikes, when you need torch-bearers in the darkness, standard bearers to uphold your honour... the womanhood of India will be with you as holders of your banner, sustainers of your strength.' She linked the woman's movement with the national struggle. It was under her initiative that the Patna session of the Women's Conference campaigned against purdah. Gandhi inaugurated the campaign and exhorted the women of India to discard the veil. Her poem *Purdah Nashin* can be studied in this light. While critics have seen the poem as a glorification of the sheltered life led by women of the royal family in Hyderabad, this is a misreading of the poem. The poem is in fact an indictment of the purdah system.

Sarojini Naidu gave a systematic and organized form to the women's movement in India. She also helped Indian women realize the intimate connection between their own progress and the nation's progress towards political and economic freedom. She stressed that women had an important role in the national life through their patient service and their aptitude for reconciling divergent interests and attitudes. She also encouraged women of the higher classes to go out of their comfort zones and take the women's movement to the villages and the masses. She dealt with various issues concerning women's issues: franchise, seclusion, economic security, political representation, right to divorces, and the importance of women in the country's cultural progress. She was convinced that instead of looking to the West for inspiration, Indian women should look at their own heritage for inspiration. She praised the ancient Indian concept of ideal woman in the Asian Relations Conference in 1947. The Statesman took her to task for it in an editorial. It charged the poetess for ignoring the ugly side of the picture and presenting a highly idealized and romantic image of women in ancient India. However, this is a misreading since through the poem she is trying to suggest the detrimental effect of preventing women from interacting with the world around them.

Characteristics of Naidu's Poetry

Sarojini Naidu earned the sobriquet 'Nightingale of India' (Bharat Kokila). This is not without merit. Her poems were praised for having an 'Indian Soul' even though she used the English language to pen her thoughts. A characteristic feature of her poetry is that even though the words are English, the soul of her poems is very Indian. They project an Indian ethos in imagery, sound, rhythm and ideology. At the same time, it must be remembered that she was not blind to the faults and drawbacks of her country and its culture. Her poetry reflects her involvement with Indian life. She said about herself:

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‘The lyric child had grown into the lyric woman. All the instincts of her awakening womanhood for the intoxication of love and the joy of life were deeply interfused with the more urgent need of the poet’s soul. For a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision its subtle and inexpressible thoughts.’

There is a psychological element in her poetry. Sarojini Naidu explored the deeper recesses of the mind in her poems. A look at her work reveals Naidu’s acknowledgement of the fact that sometimes the subconscious mind overrules the conscious.

The poetess used symbols to convey a sense of irony and a sensuousness that was very unique to her and was indicative of her ability to tap into the ‘Indianness’ of her readers. She also used symbols and allegory to present her thoughts, feelings and mystical visions. For example, the figure of Radha is indicative of the poetess’s scorn for people who consider faith a matter of following customs and going through the motions. At the same time, her joy at the world around her and the physical pleasure her friends take in the dance are indicative of her understanding and appreciation of the basic sensuousness of her countrymen. In fact, she used words to create sensuous images in her poetry.

There is a pictorial quality to Naidu’s poetry and she greatly resembles D. G. Rossetti in this. She gave full play to all the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch in her poetry, and in doing so brought India and the very Indian scenes to life on the page.

Lyricism is another marked characteristic of Naidu’s poetry. Her lyrics are full of music, charm and fascination. Though there is an undercurrent of melancholy and pessimism in her work, the poems are nevertheless forward looking and anticipate the soul’s union with the eternal and the infinite. Dr. S. Z. H. Abidi remarks:

‘A study of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is a delightful affair. She is a poet of colour and melody and beauty while her poems, one is bound to be deeply involved in her aesthetic response to things.’

Her poetry reveals the influence of Persian poetry with its dominant theme of love. Hafiz, Khayyam and Rumi influenced her greatly.

Themes in Naidu’s Poetry

An aversion to tyranny, and a love of liberty and the regeneration of India through independence were the major themes of Naidu’s poems. Sarojini Naidu believed that the Supreme Being is reflected in all creatures. Therefore, she tried to find ameliorative characteristics in the most reprehensible of them. Her poetry was purely Indian in themes and background. Lyricism, symbolism, imagery, mysticism and native fervor were the remarkable qualities of her poetry. Naidu dealt with themes of Nature, Folk Life, Love, Life and Death and Mysticism.

Patriotism

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was among the first to realize Sarojini Naidu's talent and skill. He encouraged her to compose patriotic songs. He convinced her that through her representation of images of the typical Indian life and beliefs, she could give immediacy to the cause of independence in the minds of the populace. Sarojini Naidu was successful in doing so and her poems espouse her belief that one day the nation will be free to decide and govern its own destiny. There is a faith in the motherland and a desire to serve and protect her in the poems. Poems addressed to Gandhi and his vision of the freedom movement and a free India fall under this category.

A salient feature of these poems was her ardent wish that her countrymen rise above the narrow concern of caste and creed to work in a united manner to achieve freedom. She was an idealist and her poems are full of idealistic notes and visions.

Stages of Human Existence

Naidu's poems also dealt with the various stages of human existence from childhood, youth to old age and death. Her poems point to the inevitability of the passage of time and death. In her poems which are based on this theme, she explored the various ways one can live one's life and comes to the conclusion that since death, sorrow and decay are certain, all one can do is do one's duty. In these poems, she also highlighted the fact that change is the law of existence to which we are all subject, irrespective of the class, caste or religion. In other words, these poems also highlight the essential similarity underneath surface difference. This aspect of her poetry is important if we consider the fact that as the nation veered closer to the Independence, dissonance in the political discourse became prominent and almost threatened the freedom movement.

Religious Symbols

Naidu's poetry is replete with figures associated with religion. The figure of Radha figures prominently in her poetry. She also used the figure of Gautam Buddha to suggest the need for meditation to attain eternal peace of mind. Meditation helps the individual in the search for truth. It enables the individual to rise above the evils and ills of a worldly existence and achieve true transcendence. The image of Radha also implies a state of existence wherein the individual rises above the travails of mere existence to attain a true knowledge of himself and the world around him. Since these characters figure prominently in the cultural, historical, philosophical and mental landscape of the country and its people, by using these images she taps into a latent desire of her countrymen to accept the inevitability of facing both joys and sorrows in their life and yet to remain unaffected by them. In her poems dealing with these themes, she reflected on desire for love, truth and spiritual gain.

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She had no interest in worldly delights. It is her sublime nature that she wished to see all satisfied.

Love

Sarojini Naidu viewed love as more than just a physical state; for her, it is a sublime and spiritual state as well. According to her, true love may begin from the awareness of the physical but it quickly transcends the physical state when the lovers attempt to achieve a spiritual state of union. Naidu's love poems also reveal her mysticism. Her poems reveal the love of the human soul for the divine. In her poetry, women are projected as a sacred beloved who are willing to surrender before their lovers.

The lover and the beloved are the two persons with one soul. She does not undermine the importance of the physical love since it is the physical which leads to spiritual and intellectual fulfillment. The passionate mutual love breaks down the hard walls of the ego and produces a new being composed of two-in-one.

Women

They form a major element of Naidu's poetry. When she talks about women, she is sensitive to the loneliness and hopelessness that they face in the country. In her poetry, she presented the woman's point of view and demands freedom for woman. In her poems, she presented women from different sects dancing, enjoying and involved in the thoughts of their lovers. The aim was to universalize the female experience across class, caste and religious lines. Sarojini's poems breathe an Indian air with particular light on women and their glory. They are mellifluous and disclose an image of ideal woman of Ancient times.

Naidu wanted to give proper importance to woman as a human being. In view of the reprehensible conditions women are forced to live in, her love poetry becomes even more important. True love liberates and is the antidote to loneliness and sorrow. Therefore, her representation of the union of physical and spiritual desire can also be seen as a desire to renegotiate gender relations in the new country that was being born during the struggle for independence.

Mysticism

The tone of mysticism is very strong in her poetry. This mysticism is more of a mood rather than a systemized philosophy of life. It is a tendency of religious feeling marked by an effort to attain to direct and immediate communion with God. Commenting on this aspect of her poetry, Rajyalakshmi observed: 'She is goaded by a hunger for the eternal, the unknown and the infinite and seeks, poetically rather than metaphysically, to relate herself to the universe.' In Sarojini Naidu's mystical poems, one finds an ardent quest of the poetess to unite with the Infinite. In *Song of Radha* the poetess described herself as a devotee in search of the Infinite, leaving all worldly pleasures.

Her mystical poetry reflected her faith in the language of the Hindu mystic poets and the Sufi mystic poets. It also conveys the romantic aspect for 'The

essence of Romantic poetry is that in catching the fleeting moments of joy it opens the doors to an eternal world'. The mystic bent in her poetry bears the seal of Vedic concept. She blended mysticism with the Indian mythology, giving it a unique character.

Sarojini Naidu:
Love and Death

Poetic style

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is full of colour and beauty. Though her poetry has rhythm and reveals a melodic fervour, nonetheless it is more sophisticated than Toru Dutt's poetry. Moreover, even as her poetry isn't as philosophically profound as Sri Aurobindo's poetry, it reveals the belief that spirituality is an essential feature of life in India. Her poems revealed a mythical experience and is harmoniously balanced even as they reveal intense personal feeling. Overall, her poetry revealed a harmony between the English sensibility and an Indian sensibility. According to Wiliam Walsh her poetry blends 'in the true nineties ways the sweet, the fluent, and the hectic'.

It must be noted that even as though poems deal with emotion, there is an authenticity of feeling.

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Check Your Progress

1. In which year was the Women's Indian Association established?
2. Who was the first female governor of Uttar Pradesh?
3. Which work of Sarojini Naidu earned her the title of 'Bulbul-e-Hind'?

3.3 LOVE AND DEATH: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

*I dreamed my love had set thy spirit free,
Enfranchised thee from Fate's o'ermastering power,
And girt thy being with a scatheless dower
Of rich and joyous immortality;
Of Love, I dreamed my soul had ransomed thee,
In thy lone, dread, incalculable hour
From those pale hands at which all mortals cower,
And conquered Death by Love, like Savitri.
When I awoke, alas, my love was vain
E'en to annul one throe of destined pain,
Or by one heart-beat to prolong thy breath;
O Love, alas, that love could not assuage
The burden of thy human heritage,
Or save thee from the swift decrees of Death.*

The poem is a sonnet from Sarojini Naidu's collection *The Bird of the Time*. Sarojini Naidu's poems reflect the influence of the natural imagery found in English poetry. However, the images and the cadence of the ideas have been 'Indianised' to reflect ideas and emotions that reflect the Indian ethos and experience. The

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poem deals with the pain of a woman as she reconciles herself to the death of her beloved.

The trope of love conquering all is used by Naidu in the poem. The speaker acknowledges that her beloved is no more and has passed on. However, she continues to imagine that this is not the case: she draws the romantic ideal of an all-encompassing love to imagine a situation where her beloved will return to her. The ideas of Love and Death are personified here. Naidu draws on the idea of love as a transcendental experience: it is more than a mere union of the body. It is a spiritual experience. The ability of looking beyond oneself and connecting with another is one way by which immortality can be defeated. It is this idea that the poet draws upon in the opening lines of the poem. She postulates that it is her love that has freed her beloved from Fate and rescued him from the unending cycle of life and death. She believes that her love has emboldened his 'spirit' to experience all that it could and experience life to its fullest. The image of 'enfranchisement' is very interesting here. It implies that the lover's spirit has been emboldened and given the power and confidence to rail and succeed against whatever the fates had ascertained for him only under the tutelage of the woman's love. In other words, this love becomes a liberating experience.

Naidu then goes on to highlight the ways in which the woman's love has liberated the man. She imagines that it has surrounded him with a 'rich and joyous immortality'. This is a very interesting turn of phrase. Here the poet is suggesting that love has power to protect not only physically but also spiritually, emotionally and mentally. It is a woman's love that protects the man from all dangers. In a patriarchal society, the idea of 'protection' is associated with the male figure. In the poem, however an inversion of the idea takes place. Instead of being the one who is protected, the woman is the one who is protecting. The masculine connotations of the term are feminised and the creative and nurturing principle that resides in the body of the woman is foregrounded. This construction is further bolstered by the references of the love between Satyavan and Savitri. The two are a legendary couple mentioned in the Mahabharata. Savitri goes toe to toe with Yamraj, the god of death, to restore life to her husband who has perished. According to one version of the story, Savitri follows Yamraj even as he drags Satyavan's soul. The god of death is impressed by her loyalty to her husband and grants her a wish. Savitri asks that he bless her with many sons. When the wish is granted she says that her husband's soul has to be restored as she hasn't given birth to any son. Yamraj has no other option but to comply. The story is an archetype of devotion, love and the belief that love conquers all.

It is this idea that the speaker picks upon here. Even though she recognizes that her beloved is dead, she believes that the strength of her grief and her love will be sufficient to bring him back to life. She recalls her belief that her love would be enough to protect the beloved from mortality. This is a poignant moment in the poem since it brings the ideal of love and its fragile nature face to face. Love is so

strong that it allows the couple to face all the trials and tribulations. However it cannot escape the final truth of life: that which is born has to die. It is precisely this image that the poem tries to convey.

The female speaker imagines that her love will protect the beloved and grant him immortality. She imagines that her love is like a cover that protects the beloved. This image of cover is important since she goes on to say that she believed that no hands could come and rip them from around him. When she imagines the protection that her love granted the beloved, one can see traces of martial imagery.

Another important factor to consider in the story of Savitri and Satyavan is that when the two reside in the forest, Satyavan is the son of a blind king who lives in a forest. Thus, he is both a king and not one at the same time. A warrior protects his beloved from all dangers. This image is inverted here: the woman becomes the warrior who protects her beloved. Savitri is a case in point. It is this idea that the poet elaborates: even as the speaker bemoans the death of her beloved she is reminded of her belief that her love would protect him. It would be a safety shield around him which no one could penetrate. However, this has not proven to be the case since the hands of death have successfully ripped this protection from him and has carried him away. Death is personified as a lanky, spectre whose hands are bony and have no blood flowing through them. The image is further developed when she suggests that everyone cowers in fear at the mere thought of approaching death. In other words, the female speaker becomes a loyal, valiant sentry protecting the beloved at all costs against all dangers and enemies. It is the woman who has thrown a field of protection around her beloved and guards him zealously. The image of Savitri that is inserted here lends further importance to the domestic sphere in Indian society.

In the Savitri-Satyavan story, the former stands against god to protect her husband. The toy is a trope suggesting a very Indian idea: a woman is nothing without her husband. The story makes it very clear that her parents were unhappy at Savitri's decision to marry her husband despite knowing that he would die within a year of marriage. The fact that she insists on going through with marriage is crucial: it implies an unwavering belief in the institution. However, the institution of marriage clearly demarcates roles and responsibilities between man and woman. While it is the man's duty to provide for and protect his wife and family, it is the wife's duty to provide heirs.

Sarojini Naidu played a very important role in the freedom struggle. In fact, the role of Indian women in the freedom movement cannot be denied or overlooked. They were on the forefront of the Non-Cooperation Movement and courted arrest as much as men. Seen in light of this, the inversion of the gender roles wherein the woman is the protector and the man is the protected become very important. There is recognition that it is only when the two parties work together and share all roles that they will be successful. Therefore, a new nation can only be built when all Indians irrespective of gender work collaboratively.

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However, the poem *Love and Death* is not an escapist fantasy. Even though the speaker imagines that her love would prove sufficient to protect her beloved, the absence of the beloved implies that this belief has come true. At this point of time, the speaker is compelled to acknowledge the pain that has been brought about due to permanent separation from her lover/husband. Thus, the dream fantasy is broken when she wakes up and finds herself alone. Her tragedy is greater than a simple absence of her beloved. Not only does she have to face his absence, there is no way that she can overcome the pain and trauma that this absence elicits. In other words, she has to go through the heart-wrenching pain of experiencing the sorrow of his absence. She has to reconcile herself to the fact that even though she tried her best she could not prevent Death from stealing her beloved away from him. She realizes that despite all the human emotions that she felt for him and the tactile nature of their relationship, she could not protect him.

The poem is a lament at the death of the beloved. It is a heart wrenching description of the journey that we have to take to recover from the death of a loved one. It goes on to describe the pervasiveness of death: it touches all of us and no one can escape its finality. The fantastical story of Savitri where she succeeded in bringing her husband ceases to be a story of comfort and resilience: it is a warning that it will never happen. Thus, it points towards the need to devise strategies to reconcile oneself to the death of a close one.

In this respect, the movement of the poem from a dream to a state of waking up is noteworthy. It is while the speaker is sleeping and having a vision that she dreams of a situation where the beloved is alive and well. The dream is representative of the struggle between the subconscious mind and conscious mind to reconcile the speaker to the truth. The fact that even in the dream, as she fantasizes of protecting him, the cold hands of death rip the cover from him, it is clear that the reality of the extent of her loss is ever present. The speaker is incapacitated by her loss and the grief it causes. However, the poem is not about loss and despair. It is a poem about recovery and life.

The last lines of the poem make it clear that the speaker acknowledges the fact that even though she tried her best she was unable to protect the beloved from the steady advance of death. Even as she despairs over this, it is clear that the speaker acknowledges that she did all she could to protect him. Here, the martial imagery hinted at earlier becomes even more incisive. The last lines can be seen as the articulation of a brave warrior who has fought valiantly in a battle even though the odds were stacked against him. One can imagine the speaker as a warrior who is standing in a battlefield surrounded by the debris of all that he held dear. The only consolation that he has at this moment when he faces the annihilation of all that he held dear is that he tried his best and did not run away from the fight even though defeat was inevitable. In other words the speaker is acknowledging that she tried her best to protect her beloved.

It is in doing so that the poem celebrates life: death is the inevitable conclusion of life. Any desire to cheat it is infantile and impossible. What matters is not that

the beloved dies, but how he lived his life and faced death. It is the understanding of this idea that takes one on the road to recovery and back to a greater understanding and appreciation of life. It would also be noted here that the speaker of the poem is a woman which makes the idea of life and death even more interesting. In the Indian context, a woman's life has no meaning without her husband: it is the husband that gives any respectability and structure to a woman's life. The unquestioning acceptance of this idea is evident from the fact that Savitri did not hesitate to fight against fate itself to revive her husband. The fate of widows in India is pitiable. They are seen as burdens and abandoned by family members without any support. So one can question whether Savitri was loyal out of love for her husband or out of sheer necessity and self-preservation.

When the speaker wakes up from the dream and confronts the reality of the death, it is also a liberating experience: it is an acknowledgement of the fact that even though the beloved is died, she is still alive. It is a celebration of the life that we have. Even though the speaker will carry the pain of losing someone very close to her, her life will continue. She will keep on experiencing new things. And, the speaker's life will have greater meaning since it will be tinged with a recognition of its frailty and temporariness.

In conclusion, one can say that the poem is a celebration of life in the face of death. It is also a celebration of the residence of women and a refusal of looking at them as a weaker sex: they are nurturers and warriors.

Check Your Progress

4. Name the collection in which the poem *Love and Death* first appeared.
5. Why is Savitri's story considered an archetype of love and devotion?

3.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Women's Indian Association was established in 1917.
2. Sarojini Naidu was the first female governor of Uttar Pradesh.
3. *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and earned her the title 'Bulbul-e-Hind'.
4. *Love and Death* first appeared in the collection *The Bird of the Time*.
5. Satyavan and Savitri are a legendary couple mentioned in the Mahabharata. Savitri goes toe to toe with Yamraj, the god of death, to restore life to her husband who has perished. The god of death is impressed by her loyalty to her husband and grants her a wish. Savitri asks that he bless her with many sons. When the wish is granted she says that her husband's soul has to be restored as she hasn't given birth to any son. Yamraj has no other option but to comply. The story is an archetype of love and devotion.

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3.5 SUMMARY

- Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad on 13 February 1879. Her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyay, was a doctor of Science from Edinburgh University. Sarojini Naidu's mother, Barada Sundari Devi was a Bengali poetess.
- Naidu was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. While she was in England, Sarojini Naidu met her future husband Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu who was a non-brahmin doctor. They married in 1898.
- The partition of Bengal in 1905 inspired Sarojini Naidu to join the Indian National movement. Her interaction with luminaries like Tagore, Gokhale, Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru honed her political beliefs and increased her political activism.
- Sarojini Naidu's accomplishments are legendary. She was one of the framers of the Indian Constitution. She was also the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress as well as the first female governor of Uttar Pradesh.
- Sarojini Naidu played an important role in the history of Indian literatures in English. When she first started writing poetry, the literary scene was replete with poets who were imitating their British idols.
- Toru Dutt was the one of first Indian poets to use native symbols and images in her poems. Sarojini Naidu followed in her footsteps. Her poems are rooted in the Indian myths, legends and folklore.
- Sarojini Naidu was a child prodigy and began writing at the age of 12. *Maher Muneer*, her first play impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. It was written in Persian and is indicative of the wide influences that can be seen in her later works. She was given the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India' for her poetic works.
- Naidu's reputation as a poet was cemented when *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and earned her the title 'Bulbul-e-Hind'. Her second volume *The Bird of Time* (1912), deals with the issues of death and grief. The dominant note in *The Broken Wing* (1917) is patriotic and she focuses exclusively on the description of Indian culture.
- In 1918, *Feast of Youth* was published. Later *The Magic Tree*, *The Wizard Mask* and *A Treasury of Poems* also came out. *The Sceptered Flute: Songs of India* (1937) was a collection of the first three volumes of her poetry. *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961) published posthumously, contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu.
- While Sarojini Naidu worked for the overall upliftment of Indian women, her approach was not confrontational. She was not working along the lines

of Western feminists when they campaigned for ‘emancipation.’ Instead, her aim was to generate a sense of harmony between the two sexes so that they could co-operate and work together for freedom and progress. She worked on the need for education for women and also protested against social practices that led to discrimination against women.

- There is a psychological element in Naidu’s poetry. Sarojini Naidu explores the deeper recesses of the mind in her poems. There is a pictorial quality to Naidu’s poetry and she greatly resembles D. G. Rossetti in this. Lyricism is another marked characteristic of Naidu’s poetry. Her lyrics are full of music, charm and fascination.
- An aversion to tyranny, and a love of liberty and the regeneration of India through independence are the major themes of Naidu’s poems. Naidu dealt with themes of Nature, Folk Life, Love, Life and Death and Mysticism.
- The poem *Love and Death* is a sonnet from Sarojini Naidu’s collection *The Bird of the Time*. Sarojini Naidu’s poems reflect the influence of the natural imagery found in English poetry. However, the images and the cadence of the ideas have been ‘Indianised’ to reflect ideas and emotions that reflect the Indian ethos and experience. The poem deals with the pain of a woman as she reconciles herself to the death of her beloved.
- Naidu also refers to the story of Satyavan and Savitri. Satyavan and Savitri are a legendary couple mentioned in the Mahabharata. Savitri goes toe to toe with Yamraj, the god of death, to restore life to her husband who has perished. The god of death is impressed by her loyalty to her husband and grants her a wish. Savitri asks that he bless her with many sons. When the wish is granted she says that her husband’s soul has to be restored as she hasn’t given birth to any son. Yamraj has no other option but to comply. The story is an archetype of love and devotion.
- The poem *Love and Death* is not an escapist fantasy. Even though the speaker imagines that her love would prove sufficient to protect her beloved, the absence of the beloved implies that this belief has come true. At this point of time, the speaker is compelled to acknowledge the pain that has been brought about due to permanent separation from her lover/husband.

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3.6 KEY WORDS

- **Sobriquet:** It is a nickname or an unofficial title given to somebody or something.
- **Allegory:** It is a narrative in which a character, place, or event is used to deliver a broader message about real-world issues and occurrences.
- **Sonnet:** It is a fourteen line poem with a fixed rhyme scheme.

3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. How did Sarojini Naidu work mark a departure from the Romantic Poetry?
2. Give a brief outline of Sarojini Naidu's literary career.
3. Briefly mention the characteristics of Sarojini Naidu's poetry.
4. How does Sarojini Naidu subvert gender roles and expectation by using the story of Satyavan and Savitri?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss Sarojini Naidu's contribution towards women's issues.
2. Explain the important themes explored by Sarojini Naidu in her poems.
3. Critically analyse the poem *Love and Death*.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS

Hoskote, Ranjit. 2002. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books India.

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UNIT 4 TORU DUTT: *LAKSHMAN*

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 About the Author
 - 4.2.1 Poetic Style
- 4.3 *Lakshman*: Critical Analysis
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

Renowned poet Toru Dutt is seen as one of the founding figures of Indian-Anglian literature. Known for her interpretation of Sanskrit texts, her poems are seen as a kind of ‘homecoming’. It is for this reason that Toru Dutt’s poems are often read as diaspora writing. Her life in France offered a different perspective and in her works we find an amalgamation of two different cultures. In this unit, we will discuss in detail her poem *Lakshman* and analyse her rendering of the Dandika Forest episode of the *Ramayana*.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Toru Dutt
- Examine the poetic style of Toru Dutt
- Critically analyse the poem *Lakshman*

4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toru Dutt was born in Rambagh, Calcutta on 4 March 1856. She was a renowned poet, translator and writer, and is seen as one of the founding figures of Indo-Anglian Literature. Her parents were deeply influenced by Christian missionaries. Her father Govind Chandra Dutt converted to Christianity in 1862. Toru Dutt’s early years were spent in Calcutta, and in Baugmaree, where she learnt English, French and Bengali. She became familiar with Indian epics and tales through the stories her mother told her. The family migrated to France in 1869, four years after the death of her brother Abju, since Govind Chandra Dutt was determined to give

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his daughters, Toru and Aru, the best possible education he could. In France, the children learnt the language, history, art and music, especially the piano. Later, the family moved to England where Toru Dutt studied at Cambridge. Women could not officially attend and study at Cambridge at this time. They could only access the lectures under the aegis of Henry Sedgwick and Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the 'Lectures for Ladies.' This later became Newnham College in 1871. Even though she was not a member of Cambridge, it is clear that she was familiar with the intellectual discussions taking place and was influenced by the same. It was during these lectures that she met English feminists like Anne Jemima Clough. During this time, she became friends with Mary Martin, who subsequently proved to be a treasure trove of information regarding the author. The family returned home to Bengal in 1873. Upon her return, she learnt Sanskrit and reacquainted herself with her cultural roots.

Toru Dutt's first publication, an essay on the French poet Leconte de Lisle, was published in *Bengal Magazine*. Soon after she wrote her first work *The Diary of Mademoiselle D'Arvers*. Her elder sister Aru made illustrations for the book which could be published only in 1881. She also wrote *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, translations of French poetry, and *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature. Her fame as a poet rests largely on the second volume. Like her siblings, Toru Dutt died of consumption when she was only 21.

Poetic Style

When we explore the poems in the *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, we see that the themes are familiar to the Indian audience and it is tempting to read them as a kind of 'homecoming'. It is interesting that these poems are written in English and not in the original vernacular. Mukherjee notes that like her contemporaries she viewed the 'vernacular' as 'the repository of interiority and imagination, and English as a rational tool for polemics and persuasion'. He insists that the reader and critic need to remember that contrary to perception, English had seeped in to the mind and consciousness of the elite of the country: for them it was no longer an alien language. English was, as Malashri Lal says, 'neither indigenous nor alien'. Thus, even though the tales from Sanskrit are in English, they are not an escape; they are an attempt to 'come home'. In other words, it was Toru Dutt's attempt to understand her homeland and reconcile the differences that she encountered there after her life in Europe. In many ways, it can be seen as diaspora writing. In fact, distinguished Orientalist James Darmesteter characterized Dutt in 1883 saying, 'this child of Bengal... Hindu by race and by tradition, English by education; French at heart' had the 'right to a line in the history of our literature' as well as 'to our remembrance as a fragile and sweet image of that which the Hindu genius would have been able to produce under the wing of France'. He goes on to say 'isn't it strange that the only poet's soul to blossom in India since the British conquest should have turned with such an invincible instinct, towards the sun of France?'

Alokranjan Dasgupta in ‘This Fragile Exotic Blossom of Songs’ writes: ‘the revelation of the paradox of her personal identity is what she had aimed at and achieved. She was the first of the modern artists who transmuted the nervous tension of adolescence into the saner idiom of art. In the incredibly short spell of her life, she successfully crystallised the diverse ways of innocence and experience into the supreme moment of art which is brief, yet abiding’.

Toru Dutt: Lakshman

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Check Your Progress

1. In which year did Toru Dutt migrate to France?
2. Name the literary work of Toru Dutt which was based on translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature.

4.3 LAKSHMAN: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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

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

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

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*Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,
No cause is there for any fear,
Hast thou his prowess never seen?
Wipe off for shame that dastard tear!
What being of demonian birth
Could ever brave his mighty arm?
Is there a creature on earth
That dares to work our hero harm?*

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

*Rakshasas, Danavs, demons, ghosts,
Acknowledge in their hearts his might,
And slink to their remotest coasts,
In terror at his very sight.
Evil to him! Oh fear it not,
Whatever foes against him rise!
Banish for aye the foolish thought,
And be thyself, — bold, great, and wise.*

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

*For here beside thee, as a guard
'Twas he commanded me to stay,*

*And dangers with my life to ward
If they should come across thy way.
Send me not hence, for in this wood
Bands scattered of the giants lurk,
Who on their wrongs and vengeance brood,
And wait the hour their will to work.*

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

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

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

*Art thou in secret league with those
Who from his hope the kingdom rent?
A spy from his ignoble foes
To track him in his banishment?
And wouldst thou at his death rejoice?*

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*I know thou wouldst, or sure ere now
When first thou heardst that well known voice
Thou shouldst have run to aid, I trow.*

*Learn this, — whatever comes may come,
But I shall not survive my Love,
Of all my thoughts here is the sum!
Witness it gods in heaven above.
If fire can burn, or water drown,
I follow him: — choose what thou wilt
Truth with its everlasting crown,
Or falsehood, treachery, and guilt.*

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

*She said and proudly from him turned, —
Was this the gentle Sita? No.
Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,
The tears therein had ceased to flow.
“Hear me, O Queen, ere I depart,
No longer can I bear thy words,
They lacerate my inmost heart
And torture me, like poisoned swords.*

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

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

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

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

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

*For though ill omens round us rise
And frighten her dear heart, I feel*

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*That he is safe. Beneath the skies
His equal is not, — and his heel
Shall tread all adversaries down,
Whoever they may chance to be.
Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown
And peace for ever rest with thee!*

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

Lakshman is a poem by Toru Dutt and describes the events following the exile of Ram is at the behest of his mother Kaikeyi. He is accompanied in this exile with his wife Sita and younger brother Lakshman. During the course of their exile, the trio set up residence in Dandika forest. It is here that the Demon king Ravan's sister Supernakha is enamoured of Lakshman's beauty and proposes marriage to him. When the latter refuses, citing that he is already married and has vowed to look after his elder brother and his wife, she is enraged and tries to attack Sita. The *Ramayana* famously states that her nose is cut. She goes to her brother Ravan lamenting and crying about her sorry state. She asks for revenge. The king of Lanka decides to investigate for himself and goes to Dandika forest. The moment he sets his eyes on Sita, he is enraptured of her beauty and decides to kidnap her. He tasks Marichi, a fellow demon who can take on different guises to take on the garb of a golden musk and tempt Sita. Inevitably when Sita sees the golden musk frolicking near the residence, she requests her husband Ram to hunt and kill the golden musk for her. Even though Ram tries to tell her that the golden musk is not what it seems, he cannot deny her request and goes on the hunt. Ram pursues the golden musk to the very heart of the forest where Marichi cries and imitates Ram's voice. Marichi exclaims that he is dying and that he needs help. He calls for Lakshman and shouts his name repeatedly. The poem *Lakshman* picks up from this moment of crisis and describes the agony that Sita feels at hearing her husband in pain.

The first stanza of the poem starts almost in the middle of the action when Sita hears Ram's cry of pain echoing through the forest several times. She insists that Lakshman acknowledge that these are Ram's exclamations of pain. She further asks Lakshman to go and protect his elder brother. It must be noted here that

before Ram went on the hunt for the golden musk, he asked his younger brother to ensure Sita's protection, and insisted that she should not be left alone under any circumstances. In her panic, Sita ignores all these instructions and declares that Lakshman has only one course of action open before him: he has to follow Ram into the forest since it is difficult to assess the danger that the latter is in from a distance. Sita postulates that Ram could be surrounded on all sides by enemy who, even as they are standing and discussing on their course of action, could be raining fatal blows on her husband. At the stanza end of the stanza, Sita questions Lakshman as to why he refuses to go to his brother's aid and obey her as he had promised. The first stanza places this action at a very critical moment; even though Sita is the one talking, it is very clear that the desired action rests at Lakshman's feet. At this point of time, Lakshman is torn between his duty to brother and his duty to Ram's wife.

The moment Sita hears Ram's cries of pain, she gives into hysteria and insists that Lakshman pick up the sword and bow. She demands that he go to his brother's defence and perform the duties that have been assigned to him. At various points in the epic *Ramayana*, the bard goes out of his way to emphasize Lakshman's rashness and his tendency to act before he has all the facts before him. Therefore, it is ironic that, at this point of time in the story, when he attempts to act only after he has all the facts and tries to comply with his elder brother's dictates, Sita insists that he follow his rash self. Sita is enraged that instead of picking up his arms and going to his brother's aid, Lakshman is stoic and unmoving. He ignores her request and commits himself to his brother's orders. She is aghast and wonders if the silent, quiet Lakshman is the same bold warrior of yore. At this point in the story, Lakshman's response is seen in two ways: a brother obeying his elder brother and thus following his *dharma*; and a frightened man refusing to risk his life to help a man who might already be dead. Sita views Lakshman's actions to be that of a frightened man. Her horror at Lakshman's indecisiveness leads her to exclaim that if he refuses to act, she would have no option but to run in the woods in an attempt to protect her beloved husband. The poem goes on to describe her emotional and mental unravelling as the cries of her husband reverberate through the forest. The silence following the cries unnerves her even more: she fears that Ram might have been killed. She insists that if nothing else she wants to be near her husband as he breathes his last.

The first two stanzas of the poem describe Sita's state of mind as she struggles with the idea of death of her husband. Intellectually, she is aware that nothing can harm her husband. Sita does not doubt his bravery and valour. Nevertheless it is her love for him that blinds her to this and makes her an easy target of manipulation.

Lakshman emerges as the voice of sanity and tries to inform Sita of the reality. He addresses her as 'Vaidehi Queen' in an effort to remind her of her status as the future queen of Ayodhya. He tries to ground her and reminds her of Ram's unsurpassed bravery and skill. He tries to tell her that she herself has witnessed

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Ram's bravery both in the Swayamvar and has heard tales of his military skill and might. He tries to tell her that she is worrying needlessly and that no harm would come to her husband. In fact he goes further and reminds her that the fear that she expresses does her husband's reputation no favour. It does not behoove the wife of a great warrior to show such cowardice. He calls her reaction 'dastard fear'.

He goes on to ask a rhetorical question as to whether she can conceive of anyone who could defeat him. He reminds her that even the most ferocious animals and hunters in the forest like the lion and the grisly bear avoid any confrontation with Ram. They fear facing him. The eagle that flies unchallenged in the air and picks out its victims with impunity also avoids any interactions with Ram. It avoids flying above Ram while he is hunting or going about his activities fearing that if it makes a noise that the Prince would be upset and angry at being disturbed. Lakshman attempts to remind Sita of an irrefutable fact: once Ram has decided on his course of action and has his enemy in his sights, the inevitable demise of the enemy is a foregone conclusion. He goes on to remind her of the ways in which other creatures that incapacitate mortal man fear facing her husband. Even venomous creatures of the forest like pythons and cobras slither away in fear when they hear the tread of the prince. The cobra that sways its hood and strikes terror in the minds of everyone cowers in fear before Ram.

Lakshman is unable to understand the cause of Sita's panic especially since she knows of her husband's valour and has in fact has witnessed instances of the same. He attempts to tell her that her lament dishonours his bravery. Lakshman goes on to remind Sita that Ram's exploits are known to the most vicious of men and demons and they go out of their way to avoid any altercation with Ram. All bullies and warriors know that were they to engage in any combat with the crown Prince of Ayodha they would only be inviting their death. Therefore, he asks her to abandon this despair and wait for Ram's return. He extolls her to behave in a manner that behooves Ram's consort. Lakshman rejects the notion that a brave warrior like Ram would be rendered helpless and would cry like a new born baby and ask for help. He believes that instead of being rendered mute and paralysed in the face of danger, Ram would meet all challenges head-on. Therefore he is convinced that the cry for assistance that Sita hears and that is rebounding in the forest is evil and needs to be rejected and overlooked.

Lakshman tries his utmost in convincing Sita to keep her cool and await her husband's valiant return. Moreover, he reminds Sita that it was her own husband who had tasked him with taking care of her. Thus, were he to leave the latter at her behest, he would be acting contrary to the explicit instructions of the elder brother whom he had promised to obey and follow. Lakshman tries to remind Sita that she needs to resist in making unjust demands since in doing so she too is behaving in a manner contrary to the one she had agreed to with her husband before he left to hunt for the golden musk. He goes on to remind Sita about the need to stand and protect her: they are surrounded by enemies who await only a lapse on their part before they wreck vengeance of the prince of Ayodhya.

However, Sita is inconsolable and refuses to listen to reason; she accuses Lakshman of being jealous of Ram's valour and fame. According to her, Lakshman is refusing to go to his brother's aid not because he does not believe that the former requires assistance. She accuses Lakshman of being jealous and of exploiting this occasion by ensuring that any competitor to his position as the premium warrior of his age is removed. She goes on to accuse him of coveting her. This is a heinous charge that Sita lodges against Lakshman since the latter looks at her as his mother. She puts him on par with Bharat. The latter stole Ram's rightful place as the king and Lakshman would steal Ram's rightful place with Sita in the marital bed. She goes on to accuse him of being hand in glove with Kaikeyi and others of her ilk who have resolved to deny what is rightful to Ram. She asks Lakshman whether he is a spy sent by Ram's enemies. Furthermore, she suggests that since Lakshman is refusing to act, his inaction would ensure that Ram is killed so that he can never claim his rightful place as king.

In her hysteria, Sita goes on to tell Lakshman that were her husband to die then so would she. It would not only be a metaphorical death but a physical death for her as well. In stating this, she implies that the future generations would accuse Lakshman of disobeying a woman whom he considered as his mother, or even of harboring incestuous emotions about her. Instead of becoming the embodiment of loyalty and love, Lakshman would become the epitome of treachery and falsehood. Thus, she presents before Lakshman two courses of actions. He can either stay put and tarnish his reputation or he can go to his brother's aid and ensure his name survives the mist of time. Sita is unaware that this is a Hobson's choice. Nonetheless she has put forward a course of action. She rejects all claims of fealty and faith from Lakshman and turns away from him, thereby physically and emotionally rejecting and denouncing him for his cowardice and selfishness.

Sita's rage and despair completely unnerves Lakshman who is reduced to asking for her forgiveness. He exclaims that her words have deeply wounded him and lacerated his soul and spirit. In fact, he goes on to say that he is leaving at Sita's behest in direct contravention of his brother's orders. He says that he is leaving despite knowing that his departure would wreak disaster on the family. He reminds her that this course of action gives him great pain since it contravenes his brother's orders. The military image that is used here is very revealing: individual soldiers in armies do not have the luxury of thought. They have only one task and that is to obey the orders that their generals and military bosses have given them irrespective of whether they make sense or not. This is of paramount importance since it is this blind obedience that is necessary to ensure the victory of the army and to reduce its casualties. As Lakshman had stated earlier, even though Sita is unaware of the fact, he as a soldier is aware that they are surrounded by enemies who are waiting to do them harm in Dandika forest. The only way to ensure their safety is to follow the instructions of the general, in this case Ram, and stay put. Lakshman wishes to remind Sita that her insistence on demanding a different course of action will bring disaster on all of them. He says this even as he leaves. However,

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before he leaves, he takes his arrow and draws a circle around Sita and asks her to give her word that she would not step beyond the line under any circumstance. This is the Lakshman Rekha. Even as he leaves he asks her to confirm her love for him. He calls her 'Queen' at this point of time almost as if to remind her that she is behaving in a manner that does not befit a queen. This also puts a distance between the two: Laksman seems to be suggesting that as loyal soldier he is obeying an order irrespective of his opinion. He turns to the natural world and urges all of nature to protect Sita from all harm till they return. He is convinced that any harm that may befall the family will not befall Ram, who he is convinced is safe. Instead, it will befall Sita in the supposedly safe environment of the house. The poem ends with Lakshman picking the bow and arrow and charging into the forest in search of his brother, despite knowing that the latter doesn't need his help.

It should be noted that the poem is a dramatic rendering of the Dandika Forest episode in *Ramayana*. The characters of the poem are an integral part of Indian culture and folklore. The episode itself is extremely important since it serves as the launching pad for Sita's abduction and culminates in the battle between Ram and Ravan which embodies the battle between good and evil. The poem presents the situation in a dramatic manner where the action is balanced on knife's edge. Sita's fears for her husband's safety, even though she is intellectually aware that her husband is a brave and undefeated warrior. The way the dialogue quickly degenerates into acrimony, name calling and charges of disloyalty is indicative of the ease with which the most loyal of people might lose their faith. It also highlights the difficulty in maintaining one's course of action and doing what is right in an attempt to placate one's loved ones. This episode makes the reader wonder who is responsible for the disaster that unfolds: Sita for making unjust demands since she has temporarily lost her mental balance; or Lakshman, for doing what he knows to be blatantly wrong in order to placate someone and thereby pandering to their unjust needs. The poem is titled *Lakshman* and not Sita for precisely this reason. The poet seems to be suggesting the difficulty in maintaining our reason and follow what we know to be the right path in order to satisfy our loved ones and in order to keep the peace.

Throughout the episode, Lakshman points to Ram's physical prowess to convince Sita that he is under no danger. However, Lakshman, who is a brave warrior in his own right, reveals subtler aspects to what makes a true warrior and leader. A true leader is one who doesn't get bogged down by emotional appeals and keeps to his path and does what he believes is right, despite the costs and emotional pain it might bring others. Lakshman's inability to see Sita in pain brings about great disaster. Seen in this light, one can see that this rendition also brings out the consequences of not explaining ones' course of actions and the reasons for doing so on those around us. While love may embolden and strengthen the individual, its ability to incapacitate and render the most rational and calm of personalities inert is also highlighted. If we were to consider Toru Dutt as a writer

who attempted to understand what it meant to be an Indian in a colonial world, then one may read this poem as an attempt to balance reason and emotion, two contrasting emotions that were often seen to be residing in the coloniser and the colonised native respectively. The poem ends with Lakshman storming into the forest even as he anticipates trouble in the residence. It is indicative of the belief that the native, being susceptible to emotions, would be incapable of running the nation effectively and would bring about the nation's downfall and disintegration.

The poem needs to be seen as a translation of the Sanskrit original. The story is familiar to all and there is no suspense in the action. The reception of the story differs in terms of who the reader is: for natives of the subcontinent the story is known and there is no suspense. Even for the colonial masters who might have spent time in the Indian subcontinent, the story and its outcomes were known. For readers who have no idea about the larger story of the *Ramayana*, the poem is very open ended: it does not describe as to who Ram and the other characters are, nor does it clarify how the story ends. In fact, the poet very smartly ends at the point of action. This in turn would invite the reader to engage with the story and understand its place in the country. Toru Dutt was caught between two worlds. Therefore, the poem evokes similar multiple emotions. On one hand, it evokes memories of times when her mother would recite stories from Indian culture and bind her to her cultural heritage and memory; on the other hand, it also highlights her ambivalence and outright discomfort with a 'purely' Indian identity without negotiating the consequences to the colonial masters.

Check Your Progress

3. Why does Sita ask Lakshman to leave in search of his brother?
4. What does Sita accuse Lakshman of?
5. Give a brief colonial reading of the poem *Lakshman*.

4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Toru Dutt migrated to France in 1869.
2. *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was based on translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature.
3. Sita heard Ram's cry of pain echoing through the forest therefore asked Lakshman to go and protect his elder brother.
4. Sita accuses Lakshman of being jealous and of exploiting this occasion by ensuring that any competitor to his position as the premium warrior of his age is removed. She goes on to accuse him of coveting her.

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5. The poem *Lakshman* can be read as an attempt to balance reason and emotion, two contrasting emotions that were often seen to be residing in the coloniser and the colonised native respectively. The poem ends with Lakshman storming into the forest even as he anticipates trouble in the residence. It is indicative of the belief that the native, being susceptible to emotions, would be incapable of running the nation effectively and would bring about the nation's downfall and disintegration.

4.5 SUMMARY

- Toru Dutt was born in Rambagh, Calcutta on 4 March 1856. She was a renowned poet, translator and writer, and is seen as one of the founding figures of Indo-Anglian Literature.
- Toru Dutt became familiar with Indian epics and tales through the stories her mother told her. The family migrated to France in 1869, four years after the death of her brother Abju, since Govind Chandra Dutt was determined to give his daughters, Toru and Aru, the best possible education he could.
- Toru Dutt's first publication, an essay on the French poet Leconte de Lisle, was published in *Bengal Magazine*. Soon after she wrote her first work *The Diary of Mademoiselle D' Arvers*. She also wrote *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, translations of French poetry, and *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature.
- When we explore the poems in the *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, we see that the themes are familiar to the Indian audience and it is tempting to read them as a kind of 'homecoming'. It is interesting that these poems are written in English and not in the original vernacular. In many ways, it can be seen as diaspora writing.
- *Lakshman* is a poem by Toru Dutt and describes the events following the exile of Ram is at the behest of his mother Kakeyi. The first stanza of the poem starts almost in the middle of the action when Sita hears Ram's cry of pain echoing through the forest several times. She insists that Lakshman acknowledge that these are Ram's exclamations of pain.
- Sita asks Lakshman to go and protect his elder brother. It must be noted here that before Ram went on the hunt for the golden musk, he asked his younger brother to ensure Sita's protection, and insisted that she should not be left alone under any circumstances. In her panic, Sita ignores all these instructions and asks Lakshman to follow Ram into the forest.
- Sita is enraged that instead of picking up his arms and going to his brother's aid, Lakshman is stoic and unmoving. Sita views Lakshman's actions to be that of a frightened man.

- The first two stanzas of the poem *Lakshman* describe Sita's state of mind as she struggles with the idea of death of her husband. Intellectually, she is aware that nothing can harm her husband. Sita does not doubt his bravery and valour. Nevertheless it is her love for him that blinds her to this and makes her an easy target of manipulation.
- Lakshman emerges as the voice of sanity and tries to inform Sita of the reality. He addresses her as 'Vaidehi Queen' in an effort to remind her of her status as the future queen of Ayodhya. He tries to ground her and reminds her of Ram's unsurpassed bravery and skill.
- Sita accuses Lakshman of being jealous of Ram's valour and fame. She accuses Lakshman of being jealous and of exploiting this occasion by ensuring that any competitor to his position as the premium warrior of his age is removed. She goes on to accuse him of coveting her.
- Sita's rage and despair completely unnerves Lakshman who is reduced to asking for her forgiveness. He exclaims that her words have deeply wounded him and lacerated his soul and spirit.
- The poem ends with Lakshman picking the bow and arrow and charging into the forest in search of his brother, despite knowing that the latter doesn't need his help.

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4.6 KEY WORDS

- **Feminists:** It refers to someone who believes in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes.
- **Diaspora:** It refers to a scattered population whose origin lies in a different geographic locale.
- **Exile:** It refers to the state of being forced to live outside your own country.

4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief outline of Toru Dutt's life and literary career.
2. Why are the Toru Dutt's poems read as Diaspora writing?
3. Write a short note on Toru Dutt's dramatic rendering of the Dandika Forest episode.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Examine the poetic style of Toru Dutt.
2. Critically analyse Toru Dutt's poem *Lakshman*.

4.8 FURTHER READINGS

NOTES

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UNIT 5 NISSIM EZEKIEL: *GOODBYE PARTY FOR MISS PUSHPA T.S*

Nissim Ezekiel:
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Miss Pushpa T.S*

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Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 About the Poet
- 5.3 *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S*: Critical Analysis
- 5.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.5 Summary
- 5.6 Key Words
- 5.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.8 Further Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Nissim Ezekiel is was of the pioneers of modern Indian English poetry, who is responsible for discovering and encouraging several of India's leading English poets. He was also known for his skills in translation, playwriting, and reviewing. His influence on the Indian English literary scene is very noteworthy. In this unit, we will discuss the influences on Ezekiel's literary sensibilities in the context of his famous poem, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa. T.S.*

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the life and times of Nissim Ezekiel
- Discuss the influences on Ezekiel's literary sensibilities
- Critically analyze Ezekiel's poem, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa. T.S*

5.2 ABOUT THE POET

Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Mumbai in a Bene Israel family. The Bene Israel in India speak the local Indian languages, in Nissim's case, Marathi. Ezekiel studied English literature at Wilson College, Bombay, and then went to Birbeck College, University of London, to study philosophy. On his return to India without taking a degree, he initially worked as an editor with leading journals and magazines, then taught advertising and broadcasting. He retired as Professor in the Department

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of English, University of Bombay. He has brought out numerous collections of poems and written several plays. His works include:

- *Night of the Scorpion*
- *The Doctor*
- *Case Study*
- *Poster Prayers*
- *The Traitor*
- *Poet, Lover, Birdcatcher*
- *Latter-day Psalms*
- *The Railway Clerk*
- *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.*
- *Enterprise*
- *Time To Change*
- *Sixty Poems*
- *The Discovery of India*
- *The Third*
- *The Unfinished Man*
- *The Exact Name*
- *Snakeskin and Other Poems, translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant*
- *Hymns in Darkness*
- *Latter-Day Psalms*
- *Collected Poems 1952-88 OUP*

India in Ezekiel's Poetry

India in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is a country of infirm, deficient, irrational and superstitious people who find the problems of life too intricate, and the poet seems to be trying to laugh them into honesty, sincerity, efficiency and wisdom. Here is a passage, for example, from his poem, *In India*:

*Always in the Sun's eye.
Here among the beggars.
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and God.
Burnt-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child*

*And tortured animal,
All in nosy silence
Suffering the place and time...*

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The poet is drawing his readers' attention to the miseries of poverty people encounter. When he talks of 'burnt-out mothers' he may be talking of widows being burnt as *satis*. And 'frightened virgins' might be a reference to the girls who fear goons, rogues and aggressors.

Ezekiel attacks the judicial practices of India in his poem, 'Undertrial Prisoners', wherein he writes about an undertrial prisoner who has been living in jail (for a crime which perhaps was committed ten years ago) because he is not in a position to pay his bail. Delaying justice that long is denying justice. Nay, it is doing injustice, is the poet's point. The State is not going to compensate the loss in case the man is found innocent. Even if he has committed the crime, and the punishment for the crime is imprisonment for only one year, who will give him the period of nine years which he has lost in prison?

Ezekiel also attacks the practice of releasing undertrials on bail if they have money and not-releasing them in case they have no money. He says one's richness gives one an advantage and so the practice must give a boost to people's desire to have money and they are likely to use any means, good, bad or indifferent, to enrich themselves.

Ezekiel also exposes the hypocrisy of political leaders when he writes in the poem *The Double Horror*:

*Unpolitical I still embrace the sterile
Whore of private politics, sign a manifesto,
Call a meeting. work on committees; I agree
Something must be done but secretly rejoice
When fifty thousand Chinese have been killed,
I who, as a child, wept to see a rat destroyed.
(Journal of South Asian Literature, XI, 3-4, p.14)*

Ezekiel also ridicules the middle class people for their petty ambitions: they like their sons to get administrative jobs and to own personal motor cars. A retired professor is happy to note:

*By God's grace, all my children,
Are well settled in life,
One is Sales Manager
One is Bank Manager,
Both have cars. (Latter-Day Psalms, p.23)
It is financial security that makes the father happy.*

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Tempting advertisements inducing readers to buy make people corrupt, according to the poet, and these corrupt people are likely to corrupt others. He says:

*Corrupted by the world I must infect the world
With my corruption.*

The poems in Ezekiel's *Latter-Day Psalms* evidence the fact that the poet regards the present age as a time of decay and degeneration. According to him this is the age in which the ungodly are as mighty as the godly, and if the godly cannot be removed easily, so cannot the ungodly. The sinners, according to him, are so clever that they disguise themselves and join the congregation of the righteous:

*In the congregation
Of the righteous, the sinners
Are well disguised. Do not seek
To count them. (Latter-Day Psalms, p.39)*

The government officials, according to Nissim Ezekiel, are the people who have been alienated from the masses of the country. In the poem 'The Truth about the Floods' the flood-affected people refuse to talk to a man under the impression that he is a government official: they talk to him only when he has convinced them that he is not a government official. Nissim Ezekiel stands for planned urban development and holds that it is want of planning that is responsible for people not being able to lead healthy lives and then going to healers. This view of his finds expression in his poem, 'Healers'.

The persona in most of Nissim Ezekiel's poems is that of an alienated man. He can sympathize neither with the Hindus, nor with the Muslims, nor with the Roman Catholics. The Hindus, according to him, do not possess adequate proficiency in English, are under-nourished and unsophisticated in their manners, as he writes in his poem, *Background, Casually*:

*I grew in terror of the strong
But under-nourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.*

...

*When someone talked too loudly, or
Knocked at the door like the Devil,*

They hawked and spat. They sprawled around. (Hymns to Darkness, p.11-12)

The Roman Catholics, according to him, regard all Jews as the murderers of Jesus Christ. He finds the Roman Catholics and the Muslims loose in their

morals as they unabashedly carry on illicit love affairs and indulge in immoral acts like stealing.

The poet's alienation in India finds embodiment in a large number of his poems. For instance, in 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' he ridicules Indians for their inadequate proficiency in English, as in the poem, 'The Patriot', he makes the 'patriot' say:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting fighting

Why all people of world

Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,

I am simply not understanding (Latter-Day Psalms, p.22)

This inability of the poet to adjust himself with the conditions prevailing around him has been described as Ezekiel's alienation in India by M. K. Naik in his article, 'Nissim Ezekiel and Alienation'.

Ezekiel does not regard himself as an alienated person and asserts that he is an Indian and that he loves India, as he writes:

'In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness that Mr. Naipaul discovered. I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian.'

He adds,

'India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India.'

Ezekiel claims that he is not as harsh a critic of India as V. S. Naipaul in his book, *An Area of Darkness* (Andre Deutsch, 1964) is. As a matter of fact Ezekiel defends India in the face of the charges levelled by Naipaul, as is evidenced by his article, 'Naipaul's India and Mine' (1965). Ezekiel writes:

'... in Naipaul's India, 'the clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint'. In my India, a clerk will do virtually anything for you if he is treated humanely.'

Ezekiel also rejects Naipaul's assertion that in India European engineers are paid much more than Indian engineers and one is likely to be rejected in interviews because one does not own a car. Ezekiel's comment on this assertion is:

'In my India, engineers trained abroad, provided they have what it takes, advance rapidly, buy a car before they can afford it because advancement is certain, land superior jobs even if they don't have a car and are given one by the firm, with an allowance for maintenance.'

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But the fact remains that Nissim Ezekiel is critical of much in India as he says:

‘... I see India in most ways as Naipaulsee[s] her. All that he says against the grossness and squalor of Indian life, the routine ritualism, the lip service to high ideals, the petrified and distorted sense of cleanliness, and a thousand other things, all this is true.’

Thus, Nissim Ezekiel is certainly different from poets like Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu and K. R. Srinivas Iyengar in the sense that while the latter drew attention to India’s glorious past Nissim Ezekiel draws attention to the realistic aspects of Indian life and indicates thereby that all is not well and what exists stands in need of much improvement.

Ezekiel’s Poetic Craftsmanship

Ezekiel’s poetic craftsmanship has been widely admired. He has been described to be aware of the craft of poetry as in his compositions he has said several things about it. For example, in his poem *A Time to Change* he says that the perfect poem is only a dream that cannot be realized:

*The pure invention or the perfect poem,
Precise communication of a thought,
Love reciprocated to a quiver,
Flawless doctrine, certainty of God,
These are merely dreams; ... (JSAL, p.12)*

So if one resolves to write the perfect poem, one, according to Ezekiel, is trying to achieve the impossible.

Ezekiel believes that a poem is concerned with an episode while poetry is a flow from which a poem comes. Poetry, according to him, is concerned with the reasons behind the incidents, the manner in which the incidents occur, and all such things related to it. He expresses this view in his poem, *Poetry*, in which he writes:

*A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more. It is the why,
The how, the what, the flow
From which the poem comes,
In which the savage and the singular,
The gentle, familiar
Are all dissolved, the residue
Is what you read, as a poem, the rest
Flows and is poetry.*

Ezekiel, thus, believes that it is easy to write a poem, but difficult to write poetry. He says so in his 'Foreword' to *Sixty Poems*:

'There is in each a line, or a phase, an idea or image which helps me to maintain some sort of continuity in my life... I am interested in writing poetry not in making a personal verse-record. But poetry is elusive, to write a poem is comparatively easy.'

In some of his utterances he explains how he chooses his expressions. In his poem, *A Time to Change*, he writes:

*So, in our style of verse and life
The oldest idiom may reveal
A simile never seen, limbs retain
A virginal veracity and every stone
Be as original as when the world was made.*

This makes it evident that he does not exclude even the oldest idioms from his poetic vocabulary and will use an old idiom provided he can show some novelty in it. Ezekiel holds that the right word is not easy to find and that one has to wait for it. In his poem, *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*, he says:

*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. (Latter-Day Psalms, pp. 52-53)*

This opinion of his brings him close to Flaubert who holds that a poet has to choose his words carefully and assiduously as it is only the right word, and none of its substitutes, that can correctly express the poet's meaning. This implies that he does not accept the view that one should write spontaneously.

In the poem, 'Very Indian poems in Indian English', in which he uses English sentences replete with grammatical and lexical errors, he is rejecting the very concept of Indian English implying thereby that if one chooses to write in English one must acquire adequate proficiency in the language. It is in his poem 'A Word for the Wind' that Ezekiel gives us a peep into the way he tries to find words which suit his needs and in which sound evokes the sense. He writes:

*I cannot find a word for the wind
Another word, a phrase full of it
Like a sail, (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 18)*

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He is in search of a word which should be full of wind just as a sail is full of it. That means he wants the word to make a visual appeal just as a sail does and that it should bring out its meaning in its fullness. His view that the sound should evoke the sense reminds us of Robert Frost's identical assertion in this regard.

Ezekiel believes that a poet has to be stubborn like a workman who breaks the stone, loosens the soil, sows the seed and then waits patiently for grapes or figs. He says in his poem, *A Time to Change*:

Subsidised by dreams alone

The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens

Soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits

Patiently for grapes or figs and even

Finds on a lucky day, a metaphor

Leaping from sod.

This makes it evident that according to the poet metaphors are not easy to find even if they 'leap from sod', and the poet has to search for them and wait for them with patience. In other words, he does not accept the principle of spontaneous writing which many Romantics uphold and practise.

Ezekiel loves to repeat words in new contexts in order to make them give new meanings. He repeats the words 'love' and 'world' in the following lines from the poem, *And God Revealed*, for example:

Yet we with wiser love can master love

And with the news we bring of other worlds

Enlarge the world of love with love of worlds. (JSAS, XI, 3-4, p. 20)

Ezekiel seems to take delight in using a word in various senses and gives the impression that he is trying to squeeze out as varied meanings from it as he can.

Even though Ezekiel writes verse, language in his verses is not different from the language of prose and reminds us of Wordsworth's assertion that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry. Ezekiel believes that it is only the contemporary idiom that suits poetry most. Once he remarked: 'You cannot write good poetry in a language which is not alive.'

Nissim Ezekiel has written poems in a variety of forms; sometimes his lines rhyme, sometimes they do not, but when they do, they adhere to various rhyme schemes. His poem, 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher', consists of twenty lines which have been grouped into two stanzas of ten lines each having the rhyme scheme a bb aa c dc dd. Each line in this poem is decasyllabic and is an iambic pentameter line. In the poem, 'Night of the Scorpion', there exists no rhyme scheme and the poem has been written in free verse.

Ezekiel does not like to use symbols and holds that the plain statement of truth is more powerful than any symbol and says:

*There is no symbol
More powerful
Than the plain statement
Of the truth.
So let us seek
Symbols,
They are very small lamps
Of useful words. (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 120)*

There are instances when he uses punctuation marks as per convention like in *The Neutral*:

*With, among, but never of,
Nor aloof,
Not critic, not dissenter,
Flattened out, evaporated,
Inconspicuous, merely a man
Visible as dot or smudge
In some badly printed
Newspaper photograph
Of mass meeting or procession
Joined for the sake of a believing friend. (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.129)*

However, he does not use any punctuation in the following section of the poem:

*I signed the manifesto
I paid the subscription
I worked on the committee
I attended the party
It made no difference
The common language
Hid my absence (Ibid, p. 129)*

By doing away with punctuation marks, he may be suggesting that there is no break in the process; that the process is going to continue; and that the activity is open-ended.

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Humour, Satire and Irony in Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel's works do not lack in humour. Here are some examples:

- In 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay', the wife quarrels with the husband for taking her virginity and the husband's is willing to return the same to her if only he knew how.
- In the same work, mischief is evident when the bridegroom sympathizes with his bride's mother, who is putting on an act of crying because her daughter is leaving for her groom's house, but is actually enjoying every moment:

*Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really
Crying. It was the thing to do, so she did it,
Enjoying every moment. The bride laughed when I
Sympathized, and said don't be silly.
(Latter-Day Psalms, p. 18)*

Ezekiel condones self-deception, and clearly finds it ludicrous. He ridicules people who speak of humility but do not practise it; speak of maturity but keep committing youthful mistakes. He says:

*He knows how to speak of humility, without humility.
He has exchanged the wisdom of youthfulness for the follies of maturity.
What is lost is certain, what is gained of dubious value.
Self-esteem stunts his growth. He has not learnt how to be nobody.
(HD, p. 53)*

Ezekiel conveys his opinions through irony:

- Here is an example from *The Patriot*:
*I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100 % correct.
I should say even 200 % correct
But modern generation is neglecting -
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing. (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 22)*

He is clearly making fun of the speaker, his lack of knowledge, and the very thinking behind people's claim that Indian English should be recognized and accepted as another standard variety of English. He is apparently suggesting that in each learner's life there is always a time when he feels that he is not proficient

enough in the language he is learning. Realization dawns that he is supposed to learn by putting in some effort. He is probably implying that if every inter-language is recognized as a standard variety of the language, then there will be utter confusion with too many 'standard' varieties of the language and an equally large number of learners and users. The poet conveys his opinion through '.....ancient Indian Wisdom is ... 200% correct' 100 per cent correctness is the highest point of correctness. So a person claiming 200 per cent correctness is obviously not aware of the meaning of percentage.

- In *Ganga*, irony is evident in the way Ezekiel ridicules people who are proud of themselves, their generous nature towards their servants just because they serve a maid a cup of stale tea with stale chappati. All they are doing is sharing with her something that is of no use to them. Yet they call it an act of generosity:

She always gets

A cup of tea

Preserved for her

From the previous evening,

And a chappati, stale

But in good condition.

Once a year, an old

Sari, and a blouse

For which we could

Easily exchange a plate

Or a cup and saucer. (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 140)

Satire is another tool employed by Ezekiel to arouse humour. He does not tolerate the ludicrous and loves to expose the hypocrites. He is at his satirical best when he talks of politicians in the poem, *Waking*, in which a politician is exposed by his wife:

When the politician boasted

How he had made two hundred speeches,

"No, Tom", his wife declared,

"You made the same speech two hundred times". (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 49)

Ezekiel ridicules the ways of the Indian bureaucracy too:

When the female railway clerk

Received an offer of marriage

From her neighbour the customs clerk,

She told him to apply in triplicate.

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5.3 **GOODBYE PARTY FOR MISS PUSHPA T.S:** **CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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

*You are all knowing, friends,
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
I don't mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness.
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason but simply because
she is feeling.*

*Miss Pushpa is coming
from very high family.
Her father was renowned advocate
in Bulsar or Surat,
I am not remembering now which place.*

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

*Coming back to Miss Pushpa
she is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also.*

*Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying, 'Just now only
I will do it.' That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.*

*Pushpa Miss is never saying no.
Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospect*

*and we are wishing her bon voyage.
Now I ask other speakers to speak
and afterwards Miss Pushpa
will do summing up.*

*Nissim Ezekiel:
Goodbye Party for
Miss Pushpa T.S*

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Like other Commonwealth poets, Ezekiel writes about the cultural milieu of his nation. What A.D. Hope in his poem 'Australia' writes, Ezekiel does about India in his English poems. His robust Babu's *angrezi* language is persistent in this poem and other pieces. Ezekiel has experimented in poetry. His poems, *A Very Indian Poem in Indian English*, *Irani Restaurant Instructions*, and *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa* remain unrivalled as poetic achievements in this field.

In 'Good-bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.', Ezekiel tries to re-create a character in her own situation. It strikes us as authentic as we have encountered such characters in our everyday life. The occasion of the poem is a farewell party hosted in honour of Miss Pushpa T. S., who is leaving for a new country. The protagonist is one of the speakers in that meeting. The poem is typically Indian in its content and form: the mode of the poem is very interesting. It begins with a formal address:

*Friends,
Our dear sister
Is departing for foreign land
In two three days
And
We are meeting today
To wish her bon voyage.*

The typical way in which the half-educated Indians use English is shown here with consummate skill. The use of present progressive tense in the place of simple present tense and the repetition of words for reiteration of points of view is usual in India. Ezekiel gives a sample of this:

*You are all knowing, friends,
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
I don't mean only external sweetness
But internal sweetness.
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
Even for no reason
But simply because she is feeling.*

The use of 'you are all knowing' in the place of 'you all know' and 'smiling and smiling' instead of 'smiles' are the typical way many Indians use English because of the influence of the first language. Besides, we get an example of how people flatter others in public meetings.

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Check Your Progress

1. What according to T.S. Eliot is the mark of a great poet?
2. How does Ezekiel view India in his poems?
3. Which type of tense and words are used typically in way half-educated Indians use English?

5.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. T. S. Eliot identifies the greatness of a poet with his capacity to find new comparisons.
2. India in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is a country of infirm, deficient, irrational and superstitious people who find the problems of life too intricate.
3. The typical way in which the half-educated Indians use English is shown here with consummate skill. The use of present progressive tense in the place of simple present tense and the repetition of words for reiteration of points of view is usual in India.

5.5 SUMMARY

- Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Mumbai in a Bene-Israeli family. Ezekiel studied English literature at Wilson College, Bombay, and then went to Birbeck College, University of London, to study philosophy.
- Ezekiel's poetic craftsmanship has been widely admired. He has been described to be aware of the craft of poetry as in his compositions he has said several things about it.
- Nissim Ezekiel has written poems in a variety of forms; sometimes his lines rhyme, sometimes they do not, but when they do, they adhere to various rhyme schemes.
- Like other Commonwealth poets, Ezekiel writes about the cultural milieu of his nation. What A.D. Hope in his poem 'Australia' writes, Ezekiel does about India in his English poems.
- India in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is a country of infirm, deficient, irrational and superstitious people who find the problems of life too intricate, and the poet seems to be trying to laugh them into honesty, sincerity, efficiency and wisdom.
- In 'Good-bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.', Ezekiel tries to re-create a character in her own situation. It strikes us as authentic as we have encountered such characters in our everyday life.

5.6 KEY WORDS

- **Bene Israel:** It is a community of Jews in India. It has been suggested that it is made up of descendants of one of the disputed Lost Tribes and ancestors who had settled there centuries ago
- **Theology:** It is the systematic study of the nature of the divine and, more broadly, of religious belief. It is taught as an academic discipline, typically in universities and seminaries.

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5.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How does Ezekiel concern of poetry?
2. Write a short note on the use of humour and satire by Ezekiel in his poetry.

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'Nissim Ezekiel is a master craftsman'. Do you agree with this view? Give arguments in support of your answer.
2. Discuss Ezekiel's views on India with reference to those of Naipaul's.
3. Critically analyze the poem 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa. T.S' by Ezekiel.

5.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Parthasarathy, R. 2010. *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
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UNIT 6 KAMALA DAS: *A HOT NOON IN MALABAR*

NOTES

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 About the Author
- 6.3 *A Hot Noon in Malabar*: Critical Analysis
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das is one of India's most renowned contemporary women writers. Expressing herself in two dialects, English and Malayalam, Das has authored numerous autobiographical works and books, some critically acclaimed collections of verse in English, many volumes of short tales, and prose compositions on a variety of themes. Immediately after the publication of her first collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), Das was identified as a significant voice of contemporary times, exemplified by moving beyond the existing voice and composing in a distinctly Indian tone other than taking up the methods of the English modernists. Das' challenging verses are characterized by their intense investigation of the self and feminine sexuality. *Summer in Calcutta* revolves around city-centric life and women's functions in an Indian surrounding. It mentions the political and individual conflicts of marginalized people. Das' work, especially written in English has been read and published in India, Australia, and the West. She has brought home numerous accolades and honours. In this unit, we will discuss the influences on Das' literary sensibilities in the context of her famous poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar*.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the life and times of Kamala Das
- Discuss the influences on Das' literary sensibilities
- Critically analyse Das' poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar*

6.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kamala Das is one of the first generation modern English poets who gave rise to a new poetics for themselves and started new themes and techniques around the 1960s. Kamala Das is a dominant voice of the 60s post-colonial era. Kamala Das' poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Her poetry is considerably confessional and autobiographical in nature, but sometimes she generalizes personal elements of her life. She is perhaps the first Hindu woman to write honestly about sexual feelings and her physical needs. She was also short listed in 1984 for the Nobel Prize. Feminist consciousness and language found an exponent of sensuality and spirituality in Kamala Das, who unmindful of brickbats and accolades, carried on untiringly creating poems of abiding charm, enduring empathy and inconceivable audacity. According to Malayalam poet Satchidanandan: 'She is not any woman or the incarnation of essential womanhood if at all there is one; she is an Indian poet, writing in English when Indian poetry in English is breaking free from the rhetorical and Romantic tradition.'

Awards and Recognition

Kamala Das has received many awards for her literary contribution, including:

- Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984
- Award of Asian PEN anthology - 1964
- Kerala Sahitya Academy Award - 1969 (for *Cold*)
- Sahitya Academy Award - 1985
- Asian Poetry Prize - 1998
- Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries - 1999
- Vayalar Award - 2001
- Honorary D. Litt by University of Calicut - 2006
- Muttathu Varkey Award - 2006
- Ezhuthachan Puraskaram - 2009

Compilations of some of Das' important works are as follows:

English

- 1964: *The Sirens* (Asian Poetry Prize winner)
- 1965: *Summer in Calcutta* (poetry; Kent's Award winner)
- 1967: *The Descendants* (poetry)
- 1973: *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (poetry)
- 1976: *My Story* (autobiography)

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- 1977: *Alphabet of Lust* (novel)
- 1985: *The Anamalai Poems* (poetry)
- 1992: *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (collection of short stories)
- 1996: *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (poetry)
- 1979: *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (with Pritish Nandy)
- 1999: 'My Mother at Sixty-six' (Poem)
- 2001: *Yaa Allah* (collection of poems)

Malayalam

- 1964: *Pakshiyude Manam* (short stories)
- 1966: *Naricheerukal Parakkumbol* (short stories)
- 1968: *Thanuppu* (short story, Sahitya Academi award)
- 1982: *Ente Katha* (autobiography)
- 1987: *Balyakala Smaranakal* (Childhood Memories)
- 1989: *Varshangalkku Mumbu* (Years Before)
- 1990: *Palayan* (novel)
- 1991: *Neypayasam* (short story)
- 1992: *Dayarikkurippukal* (novel)
- 1994: *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* (novel, Vayalar Award)
- 1996: *Chekkerunna Pakshikal* (short stories)
- 1998: *Nashtapetta Neelambari* (short stories)
- 2005: *Chandana Marangal* (Novel)
- 2005: *Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal* (short stories)
- 2005: *Vandikkalakal* (novel)

Kamala Das: The Poet

Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was a sophisticated Indian poetess born on March 31, 1934. She was a distinguished Indian writer who composed in English as well as Malayalam, her native language. Much of Kamala Das' writing in Malayalam were published under the pen name 'Madhavikutty'. Her mother was a Malayalam short story writer. She also embarked on her literary career as writer by writing Malayalam short stories. But after the publication of her Indian English verse collection, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), she gained a wider recognition as an author and creative writer. The success of this collection paved her way to the publication of two other poem collections: *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Play House and Other Poems* (1973).

Kamala Das' work celebrates the spirit of the Indian women of contemporary times and chronicles their agony of being bereft of love and longing for emotional fulfilment. The nature of her poetry is confessional. Her poems express her innermost desires in their existing sentiments stripped of any superfluous veil of emotions. Her poetry reflects the desires of the physical body and a quest for the beautiful and the serene that is not within her reach. This Indian poetess was also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family relations, and the family's great house.

Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das' poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place. Her poems like *Summer in Calcutta*, *In Love*, *Composition*, *The Suicide*, and *An Intensity* reflect the intensity of her feelings with an underlined feeling of protest. Das' autobiography, *My Story*, was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). She was honoured with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.

Das released six volumes of verse between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon devout and household symbolisms to investigate a sense of individuality, Das notifies of intensely individual knowledge, encompassing her development into womanhood, her failed quest for love within and outside the ceremony of wedding, and her existence in a matriarchal dominated world within the rural confines of southern India especially after inheriting the home that belonged to her forefathers.

After the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*, Das has been courted with controversy. She soon became renowned for her use of odd imagery and outspokenness in her poems. For example in her poems, *The Dance of the Eunuchs* and *The Freaks*, Das sketches the exotic to talk about her sexuality and her journey to fulfil her need. In *An Introduction*, Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and address openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women's individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman's life. In next collection of poems *The Descendants* (1967), the verse *The Maggots* interlinks the agony of lost love with existing Hindu myths, while the verse *The Looking-Glass* explains the idea that women are expected to carry out in love and passion, those very things that humanity usually marks as unclean. Yet, these are things the women are presumed to deliver when in love. The verse suggests that an unexpressed love is equal to no love experience; only a total engrossment in the emotion of love can provide fairness to this experience. In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975), verses like *Substitute*, *Gino*, and *The Suicide* analyze the malfunction of corporal love to achieve fulfilment, to help oneself release from his/her own self, or to invoke the past, while in works like *The Inheritance* looks into the integrity of the creative self in the light of devout fanaticism. In *Tonight, This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy* (1979), Das remembers Krishna in her investigation of the stress between personal love

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and religious transcendence. *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984. Some poems like *Delhi 1984* and *Smoke in Colombo* remind the readers the massacre of the Sikhs in India and the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka.

Check Your Progress

1. How is Kamala Das' poetry characterized?
2. In which year was Kamala Das shortlisted for the Nobel Prize?
3. What pen name did Kamala Das use while writing in Malayalam?
4. What does Kamala Das discuss in her poem *An Introduction*?

6.3 *A HOT NOON IN MALABAR:* CRITICAL ANALYSIS

*This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune-cards,
All stained with time, for brown Kurava girls
With old eyes, who read palm in light singsong
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with the dust of roads,
Miles, grow cracks on the heels, so that when they
Clambered up our porch, the noise was grating,
Strange..... This is a noon for strangers who part
The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak
At all, so that when they speak, their voices
Run wild, like jungle-voices. Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my
Home in Malabar, and I so far away*

This is an intensively emotional and personal poem of longing and love. It's one of her typical works evoking life in the Malabar and her unbreakable bonding and sense of belonging to the Malabar of her childhood and the kind of life and love that she envisions for herself there. Allapat Tharavad is the place where she spent her childhood which stands as a symbol of the joy of youth, of wild thoughts, men and love, for the security, belonging, and last though not the least as a symbol of innocence.

Memories of life at her ancestral house crowd the first three-fourth of the poem which is implicitly contrasted with the dull, routine and circumscribed nature of life lived in the cities. The poem thus contrasts an irresistible past with a miserable present. The entire panoply of events that unfold on the verandah of her ancestral house at Malabar comes to symbolize her childhood days and she recaptures it to regain the self that is being thwarted by city life.

Recollecting the old days, she remembers the totally unrestrained and unrestricted life she had led in Malabar. She fondly recollects how she used to swim in the pale green pond when her grandmother warned her: 'You must stop this bathing now / You are much too big to play / Naked in the pond.' This freedom and unrestrained atmosphere has framed the horizon of her expectations in a particular way. It has also redefined for her the meaning of her body and sexuality which refuses to be contained by the patriarchal control structures of the bourgeois society to which she is expected to conform eventually. However, the intensity of the longing and desire indicate that the past is not yet dead in her and neither is it going to die soon. In the tussle between the idealized freedom of the past and the reality of the constricting present, it is the past that refuses to yield, even if it is at an immense psycho-social cost.

Summary and Analysis

The poem begins by recollecting a peculiar sight from the poet's childhood and spinster days. Her ancestral house, located by the side of a main street was a concrete structure with cemented verandahs in the front and the sides and small draped windows, when the afternoon became really hot, beggars came to its door asking for alms with loud whining voices. A retinue of other persons also came to gather on the verandah to shelter themselves from the heat. Among them were the men from hills. They were fortune tellers. It was their livelihood. They carried parrots in a cage and fortune-telling cards. Those were the instruments with which they created faith among the simple believers of the small towns in the Malabar region.

The fortune telling cards were stained with time and were old. The hot noon was suitable for brown Kurava girls to come to Malabar to carry on their livelihood. They used to read palms in light singsong voices. Apart from these girls were the old bangle-sellers. They chose the poetess's veranda as it was shaded and relatively cool. They sat there spreading their red, green and blue bangles for sale.

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The bangles were attractive while the bangle sellers were covered with the dust of the road in front. The bangle sellers had to walk down long. The road was rough and hot. Therefore, the heels of their foot cracked. They climbed to the veranda making a rough scraping voice with their foot which the poet as a little girl found different from the voices that the other feet made on the floor. In fact she found it strange.

The hot noon was marked by the strangers who fearfully opened the window-drapes and looked in the room but were unable to see anything because their eyes were affected by the hot rays of the sun. It was impossible to see anything with that eye in a shadowy room. They turned away and looked at the well with great eagerness. They wanted to quench their thirst. There were also strangers who suspected each other. They remained silent. If they were excited, they became angry and their voices ran wild, as wild as free animals in forest. Thus, the hot noon in Malabar was very exciting for the poet. She wishes to spend the noon amidst those wild men, with wild thoughts making wild love. It was a torture for her to be away in the city in the controlled atmosphere of an air-conditioner. She had wild thoughts in that hot noon and a hot passion for love builds up in her.

Major Themes

The major themes of the poem are discussed below.

Past vs. Present

As the end of the poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar* suggests, the poem presents a contrast between the past and the present lives of the poet. She compares her barren monotonous life in a city to the life of hectic but unscheduled activities which was routine when she was residing in Malabar. The exotic men from hills became a fantasy for her as they bring their fortune-telling cards and parrots locked in cages and entertain her in stark contrast with the mundane and boring life of the city.

Then there are the brown *kurava* girls whose eyes gleam with the traditional knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation promising the excitement of fortune telling. The bangle sellers brought various colours of bangles and laid them on the cool black floor, the cool black floor reminds her of the warmth of acceptance contrast with hostility and suspicion in a city. Even strangers came along with companionship. She's referring to the assimilating features of her house; everybody comes in ease and settles down so comfortably as though they are family and not strangers. From here she speaks of strangers who are not strangers at all. These words remind us that she not only yearns for the beautiful ambience but also for the lost experiences of that wholeness or togetherness. We almost hear an agony in her cry when she says 'To be here far awayis torture.'

Her married life in the city is in certain senses the opposite of the kind of life she has led in Malabar. Marriage has perhaps bound her mind and body in a way

so that she finds it neither sexual nor intellectually fulfilling. Compared to wild variety unfolded on her verandah, city life presents the same dull monotony every day. People and society are fragmented and no assimilation takes place at any level. Strangers are to be feared rather than accommodated and life is experienced as a fractured. However she has lived a life so colourful that she wants to return to it. Her memory disturbs her. She feels that she has lost her past life forever as she stays in a confined city home and is far away in time as well as in distance. That is why city life is a torture.

The poem as a feminist statement

The desire to break through the normative and preferred life of marriage, city and loveless, unfulfilling sexuality in the poet is a powerful and daring critique of the patriarchal system in which she finds herself imprisoned. To understand the power and daring nature of this critique one has to first understand how a woman experiences her subjectivity in a patriarchal culture. In most societies a woman defines herself through interpersonal relationships. Sudhir Kakkar states that a woman's dependence is a marked tendency in the Indian context. Patriarchy constructs her as deficient and weak which she internalizes about herself. The woman transforms her cultural devaluation into feelings of unworthiness and inferiority. No wonder, a woman's life becomes a dehumanizing and humiliating experience in a patriarchal society. The struggle to become an equal human being with legitimate drives and desires is a struggle that awaits a woman in all patriarchal societies.

This struggle is manifested in women's literature in manifold forms. In women's poetry the persona assumes different forms corresponding to the various roles a woman is forced to assume. The different guises the persona assumes lead to multiple voices. Besides the multiple roles of daughter, wife and mother, a woman poet plays out the roles of unhappy woman, unsated mistress, selfless lover, reluctant nymphomaniac, innocuous doll, vicious seductress and ferocious witch. Each of these voices is an assertion of the woman's acceptance of the challenge spoken of earlier. The voice of the unsated wife and the discontented dweller at the home that we hear in this wife are voices of the same struggle. Both thematically and stylistically her poetry shows her experiences of living through this compromised gender state.

Read at another level these voices are also an effort to resolve a crisis of identity. All the poet's creative endeavours are directed to establish a firm, distinct identity with which she can lead a free and fulfilling life. She derives her poetic material from her life's experiences because it is only then that she can use poetry to resolve the crisis that she is undergoing and at least throw a challenge on the patriarchal set-up. A writer derives inspiration from his life, what else? A writer is like a mirror that has learnt to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand.

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Devinder Kohli describes her poetry as a sort of: ‘compulsion-neurosis’ which offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions. She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with ‘unpremeditated and unreflected emotions’. Writing is a means of self-discovery for her. She says: ‘When I write I get closer and closer to my true self... It is an activity that cannot be shared so akin it is to dying’.

The struggle is productive not only in the sense that it manages a crisis but also in that it puts a new identity in place. As Kohli observes ‘Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual freedom and identity’. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also expresses the same idea: ‘Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in largely insensitive man-made world’. Like Camus *Sisyphus* she has found the new identity in the resistance. Moving from one challenge to another, she faces disappointment again and again but does not give up.

The metaphor of heat

Why is heat and its harbinger, the summer such a favourite with Das? This is surprising because summer is most troublesome for those living in tropical countries. During this season, the difference between the haves and have-nots is most poignant. It is the difference between those who have air-conditioned rooms and those who don’t which in effect means those who can live and work comfortably versus those who will have to sweat it out or even die.

Heat, as all lovers know, is coded in difference – difference between the normal and excited states, between contained and passionate excitement. In *The Looking Glass*, one of her most famous poems, for instance, the speaker asks for the lover to be gifted with ‘the musk of sweat between the breasts’ —

*Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood.*

When Das writes about the coldness of relationships, as in *The Old Playhouse*, her metaphors posit summer as representative of the higher season of love. ‘The summer/Begins to pall Your room is/Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always/Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little ...’ In Das, there seems to be an intuitive relation between the summer sun and the vitality of woman’s life. In *The Stone Age*, ‘strong men cast their shadows; they sink/Like white suns in the swell of my Dravidian blood’. The relationship between summer and her womanhood is clear: ‘I did all my growing there/ In the bright summer months’.

In short it is heat that makes the woman active and appealing in a sexual or even non-sexual encounter. In fact Das' lines quoted above implies that heat is responsible for the distinct and perhaps most valuable part of her life right from childhood to adulthood. In the context of this poem, it is the heat that transforms the verandah from a cold and isolated space into a street market. It brings all kinds of people – men, women, girls, strangers, parrots into that space and creates a scene that the poet finds unforgettable and irresistible. It is in this heat that the poet as a girl has experienced the fullness of life with all the characters around and has experienced the overpowering influence of her own sexual urge. That is why she can directly link the wild voice of the stranger to the wild love of her life. No wonder, her husband's closed, air-conditioned room, lighted artificially 'palls' her life.

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Reference Points

Following are some of the terms which require explanation:

- **Malabar:** Coastal region of Kerala which because of its proximity to the Equator is really hot in the summers. This is also where Kamala Das' native village is located.
- **Men who come from hills:** Fortune tellers using a parrot and a pack of fortune-telling cards to prophecy the future.
- **Stained with time:** Stained because of usage through time.
- **Brown kurava girls:** Girls belonging to a particular region in Kerala whose skin has been turned brown because of sustained exposure to the sun.
- **Hot eyes brimming with the sun:** Due to sustained exposure of the harsh afternoon sun the eyes of these men have become hot. Because their pupils are extremely contracted by the harsh brightness of the sun they can see nothing into the relatively dark spaces. That is why their eyes are described as brimming with the sun.
- **Brick-ledged well:** Most village well had a small circular wall around them which was made of bricks. These thirsty people would look towards the well longingly because they would want to desperately bathe or drink at a well which did not belong to them.
- **Wild men, wild thoughts, wild love:** Refer to the poet's own desires to be in a state of complete abandonment and freedom this freedom is not only of thoughts but of being with wild men of her choice with whom she can make wild love.
- **Wild feet stirring up the dust:** Reference to the uncontrolled and undirected movement of the poet's feet in the hot Malabar sand and soil that would stir up the dust.

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Check Your Progress

5. What are the poet's thoughts at the end of the poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar*?
6. Why has Kamala Das' poetry style been described as 'compulsion-neurosis'?

6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Kamala Das' poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Her poetry is considerably confessional and autobiographical in nature, but sometimes she generalizes personal elements of her life.
2. Kamala Das was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.
3. Much of Kamala Das' writing in Malayalam are published in the pen name 'Madhavikkutty'.
4. In *An Introduction*, Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and address openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women's individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman's life.
5. The hot noon in Malabar was very exciting for the poet. She wishes to spend the noon amidst those wild men, with wild thoughts making wild love. It was a torture for her to be away in the city in the controlled atmosphere of an air-conditioner. She had wild thoughts in that hot noon and a hot passion for love builds up in her.
6. Kamala Das' poetry style has been describes as compulsion-neurosis as it offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions. She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with 'unpremeditated and unreflected emotions'.

6.5 SUMMARY

- Kamala Das is one of the first generation modern English poets who gave rise to a new poetics for themselves and started new themes and techniques around the 1960s.

- Kamala Das is a dominant voice of the 60s post-colonial era. Kamala Das' poetry is characterized by the best expression of feminine sensibility suppressed by a patriarchal order. Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was a sophisticated Indian poetess born on March 31, 1934. She is a distinguished Indian writer who composes in English as well as Malayalam, her native language.
- Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das' poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place.
- Das' autobiography, *My Story*, was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976).
- *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984.
- *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is an intensively emotional and personal poem of longing and love. It's one of her typical works evoking life in the Malabar and her unbreakable bonding and sense of belonging to the Malabar of her childhood and the kind of life and love that she envisions for herself there.
- *A Hot Noon in Malabar* begins by recollecting a peculiar sight from the poet's childhood and spinster days.

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6.6 KEY WORDS

- **Symbolism:** It is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense.
- **Matriarchy:** It is a form of social organization in which the mother or oldest female heads the family.

6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Briefly explain the poetic sensibilities of Das.
2. State the various awards and contributions of Kamala Das.

Long Answer Questions

1. Critically analyze Das' poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar*.
2. Discuss the major themes of *A Hot Noon in Malabar*.

6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - II PROSE

*Sir Aurobindo: The Fear
of Life and Death*

UNIT 7 MAHATMA GANDHI: *TOLSTOY AND THE YOUTH*

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 About the Author
- 7.3 *Tolstoy and the Youth*: Critical Analysis
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.8 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi was an eminent lawyer and the forerunner of India's freedom struggle during the colonial era. He led several movements in an attempt to attain independence for the country. For this purpose, he followed a non-violent approach of resistance and disobedience. Gandhi was inspired by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and went on to employ many of his ideas in his life while simultaneously disseminating the same for inspiring the Indian youth. The most remarkable of these ideas are 'simplicity of life and purity of purpose', the importance of manual labour, violence as a self-defeating enterprise and the importance of chastity and truth.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the early life and experiences of Mahatma Gandhi
- Analyse Tolstoy's influence on Gandhi
- Describe the importance on Tolstoy's ideas for the youth

7.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Maohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar on 2 October 1869. During his childhood he was fascinated by characters like Harishchandra who grappled with issues of truth, love and sacrifice.

He was only 13 when he married the 14 year old Kasturba Makhanji Kapadia. Though he lost a year in school he was allowed to make up for it. This must have proved difficult for him since he was an average student and was generally shy and tongue tied in front of strangers and acquaintances. Later on, he would go on to write about his marriage thus: “as we didn’t know much about marriage, for us it meant only wearing new clothes, eating sweets and playing with relatives.” He became enamoured of her and had lustful feelings about her. This sexual obsession with his wife made him extremely uncomfortable: he would anticipate nighttime when he could go to her even while he was in school.

He was forced to leave college due to financial difficulties. On the advice of a family friend, Mavji Dave Joshi, he decided to study law in London. To assuage the fears of his mother he promised to abstain from alcohol, meat and women. He was excommunicated by his caste for travelling to London despite this promise. He attended University College London and studied law and jurisprudence. He trained in Law at the Inner Temple London and became a barrister in June 1891. Even as he adopted English customs he remained true to the vow he made to his mother.

On his return, he tried to start a law practice. His shyness proved a liability since he could not cross examine witnesses. When he failed to do so he migrated to South Africa in 1893. He represented an Indian merchant in a case there. Gandhi went on to stay in South Africa for 21 years. It was while he stayed in South Africa that he developed his political and ethical views. His introduction to racial discrimination began in the country when he couldn’t sit with other whites because they considered his skin colour to be inferior. In one instance where he refused to vacate his first class seat, he was beaten up and pushed out of the train. This was the moment of his political activism. When he first arrived in the country he believed, as Herman writes that he was “a Briton first and an Indian second.” However, these experiences forced him to reassess his and his countrymen’s position and status within the empire. As he was planning to leave in 1894 the Natal government passed laws that would deny the right to vote to Indians in the territory. He decided to stay and fight against this discriminatory law. Though he couldn’t stop the promulgation of the law he was successful in drawing the attention of the authorities to the situation of Indians in South Africa. To further the cause he was instrumental in founding the Natal National Congress in 1894. This organisation united the Indian community in South Africa and turned them in to a formidable political force. Even as he was fighting for the rights of Indians, he did not challenge British rule: he along with 1100 volunteers participated in the Boer War. They

carried wounded soldiers from the battlefield to the field hospital in extremely rough terrain. When the Transvaal Government made laws making registration of people of Chinese and Indian descent mandatory, he tried his idea of satyagraha for the first time. In this he was influenced by Tolstoy's ideas as well. He urged people to protest using peaceful means, and use persuasion and public relations to resolve the issue. He would take these ideas to India in his fight against the British.

At the prompting of Gokhale he returned to India in 1915 and promptly joined the freedom movement. In an attempt to unite and mobilise the people he interacted with a wide section of the Indian populace such as farmers, urban labourers and the middle classes. He became the leader of the Indian National Congress in 1921 and led campaigns for poverty alleviation, women's emancipation etc. The abolition of untouchability and Swaraj were two ideas that he propounded during this period. He also adopted the dhoti as his signature garment in identification with the vast majority of Indians who were too poor to afford better clothes. He also adopted the charkha to espouse the idea of national pride. In 1930 he began the very successful Dandi Salt march in protest against the Salt tax that had been imposed by the British government on all Indians. In 1930 he raised the demand for complete independence from the British in the Indian National Congress.

Gandhi believed in pluralistic India where all citizens could practice their faith without fear of any reprisals and discriminations. His vision was deeply marred at the partition of British India into Pakistan and India in 1947. The violence that accompanied the partition saw Gandhi visiting affected areas in an attempt to console the people and to call for peace. He also went on a fast unto death to ensure it. Many Indians were unhappy with Gandhi's attempt to listen to the newly formed Pakistan government and to try to voice the concerns of the Muslims in India. Nathu Ram Godse assassinated Gandhi, the proponent of non-violence and peace by shooting him thrice in the chest when Gandhi was going for morning prayers on 30 January, 1948.

7.3 TOLSTOY AND THE YOUTH: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Tolstoy influenced Gandhi deeply, especially his works *The kingdom of God is within you* and his essay "Christianity and Patriotism." Gandhi was struck by Tolstoy's belief regarding "simplicity of life and purity of purpose." He first encountered the ideas of non-violence in the writings of Tolstoy. In fact Gandhi would go on to say that the book *Kingdom of God* cured him of skepticism and made him a believer in the idea of ahimsa. It was from Tolstoy that Gandhi came to believe that social evils and discriminations could be resolved through non-violent protests. In fact Gandhi describes Tolstoy as "the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present ages produced" and goes on to describe him as a "great teacher whom I have long looked upon as one of my guides."

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The relationship between the two began when Tarak Nath Das wrote to Tolstoy asking for his support for the Indian freedom struggle. In response Tolstoy wrote the letter “A Letter to a Hindu” which was subsequently published in the “Free Hindustan.” When the letter reached a young Gandhi in South Africa, he sought the author’s permission to print the letter in his own newspaper “Indian Opinion.” Thus began a correspondence that continued until the writer’s death in 1910.

In his writings Tolstoy wrote to Gandhi suggesting that he was convinced that violence as the means of survival was self-defeating enterprise and would result in the destruction and dehumanisation of the human race. He wrote to Gandhi:

The longer I live — especially now when I clearly feel the approach of death — the more I feel moved to express what I feel more strongly than anything else, and what in my opinion is of immense importance, namely, what we call the renunciation of all opposition by force, which really simply means the doctrine of the law of love unperverted by sophistries. Love, or in other words, the striving of men’s souls towards unity and the submissive behavior to one another that results therefrom, represents the highest and indeed the only law of life, as every man knows and feels in the depths of his heart (and as we see most clearly in children), and knows until he becomes involved in the lying net of worldly thoughts... Any employment of force is incompatible with love.

Inspired by this philosophy Gandhi initiated his farm in South Africa called the ‘Tolstoy Farm.’ The organising principle of life in the farm was that residents devote their life to the idea of truth, chastity and refusal of materiality. Gandhi’s experiences in the Farm were instrumental in the formation of the ideas he espoused in the swadeshi and non-cooperation movements in India later in his life.

A central feature of Tolstoy’s belief was the centrality given to hard manual labour. In fact he believed that a worthwhile life was one spent in the service of others.

According to Gandhi, Tolstoy’s teachings were important since they focused on the idea of non-violence as a means of achieving universal peace. However, Gandhi was clear that this did not imply a succumbing to evil. Being non-violent did not imply that one fatalistically accepted evil. Instead it meant a refusal to accept and cooperate with injustice without paying attention to the personal cost of this refusal. This idea was important since Gandhi wanted to tell the youth that they could only bring about change in society if they refused to follow the path of resistance and refused to be co-opted by the status quo. According to Gandhi, the youth needed to understand that real resistance did not lie in violent acts of resistance; instead they lay in quiet but steadfast refusals to allow injustices to continue. One such method of refusal to cooperate, according to Tolstoy, was a refusal to participate in military service or any aspect of colonial administration. This was a huge sacrifice that Gandhi was asking for from the youth. And he knew it. He realised that military service and a successful career in the British administrative service were the two means by which Indians could improve their day to day living conditions. However he wanted the youth to be aware of the fact that these

physical comforts were in fact markers of mental and spiritual servitude and slavery. A people could not be free if they accepted the fruits of that slavery and revelled in it. In other words, he wanted the youth to recognise the truth behind Tolstoy's words: freedom could not be achieved until all false markers of prosperity and freedom were rejected. Individual comfort belied the possibility of group comfort and freedom. In other words, Gandhi agreed with the corrupting influence of British rule in India and wanted the youth to be cognizant of the same. The 'passive resistance' struggle that he began in South Africa against the racial discrimination that the Indians experienced in the country can be summed in the following quote by Tolstoy, "The principle of State necessity can bind only those men to disobey God's law who, for the sake of worldly advantages, try to reconcile the irreconcilable; but a Christian... cannot attach any importance to this principle."

In *Indian Home Rule*, Gandhi wrote, "I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy. Tolstoy has been one of my teachers for a number of years." When Tolstoy wrote back he commented that he had had read it "with great interest because I think that the question you treat in it—the passive resistance—is a question of the greatest importance not only for India but for the whole humanity." Further in his last letter to Gandhi Tolstoy wrote that "Love is the aspiration for communion and solidarity with other souls... the supreme and unique law of human life... That law of love has been promulgated by all the philosophies—Indian, Chinese, Hebrew, Greek and Roman... it had been most clearly expressed by Christ..." He went on to critique modern statehood and said "if the law of love cannot exist, therein remains no other law except that of violence, that is, the right of the mighty. It was thus that the Christian society has lived during these nineteen centuries... Consequently, the life of the Christian peoples is an absolute contradiction between -- love recognized as the law of life, and violence recognized as inevitable in different departments of life: like Governments, Tribunals, Army, etc., which are recognized and praised." Similarly he decried the modern idea of progress and said that "Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Salvation Army, the growing criminalities, unemployment and absurd luxuries of the rich, augmented without limit, and the awful misery of the poor, the terribly increasing number of suicides—all these are the signs of that inner contradiction which... can only be resolved by acceptance of the law of love and by the rejection of all sorts of violence. Consequently, your work in Transvaal... is yet the most fundamental and the most important to us supplying the most weighty practical proof in which the world can now share..."

Annie Besant called Gandhi a "philosophic anarchist" like Tolstoy since both were mystics and were guided by "God within them" and needed no man made laws to assist them in negotiating their way through life. According to Gandhi, Tolstoy can be a great guide to the youth since he never asked others to do what he couldn't himself. From him the youth can learn that truth is possible only if one is determined to strive for it uncompromisingly. Truth in itself is extremely simple, it

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is the practice of the ideal that may prove to be difficult. Gandhi believed that the youth should be made familiar with the ideas and writings of Tolstoy since then they would realise that the belief that change could be wrought through violence was a misnomer. Non-violence and passive resistance and the strength of this idea in bringing about change was massive. Gandhi also believed that the youth needed to reassess the idea of progress: simply possessing more and building monuments of blind scientific and political dominion were irrelevant since these were markers of man's degeneration. True progress could only be possible if man realised that as long as a single individual was hungry and deprived of their rights as an individual, mankind was poor. Thus, according to Gandhi, Tolstoy's ideas that empathy was a necessary ingredient for progress. This idea in turn pivots the idea of India and the progress of the nation in an entirely new direction. As a nation India and its citizens would progress if they had greater economic freedom, prosperity and had greater spiritual and emotional freedom and prosperity.

Another salient feature that Gandhi saw in Tolstoy was the veneration of hard labour. According to the writer 'bread labour' was the only way that one could appreciate what was available to one. He believed that everyone needed to undergo hard labour in order to earn their food. This in turn would inculcate an appreciation of other's labour and bring about an appreciation of the rights of others. The idea behind this was that if an individual became immune to the trials and tribulations of those less fortunate than him, he could easily overlook any discrimination being meted out to them and also participate in them. As long as one was involved in hard labour this as impossible and thus would prevent the creation of an unequal society. If one were to consider that Gandhi focused not just on the freedom of the nation but also on the direction this free nation ought to take. This idea becomes central to his conception of the youth of the nation. Only a nation where the young appreciate the work done by their predecessors in creating an equitable society, and also realise that this equity is fragile and can turn into exploitation the moment the people turn their attention to transient notions of wealth and physical comfort ; can the nation move from strength to strength. This is possible only when every generation commits itself to this project and work hard to fulfil it. Gandhi insisted that the youth learn the value this 'bread labour' from Tolstoy. Indeed he called it "*yajna*... It is not enough that we do physical labour; we should live only in order that we may serve others." In fact Gandhi went on to develop the idea of 'bread labour' into a full-fledged theory of duty and right to work. Expounding on the idea he said that this did not mean that everyone do all things themselves, rather it meant that one does so 'as far as it is possible.' When the youth would do this they would become aware of the interdependencies and co-dependence in society and strive to create a more harmonious nation. Gandhi wrote that since this wasn't done 'dire poverty' has arisen in the world and especially so in India. This is also the main cause of ill health and the immense greed for acquisition of wealth.'

Gandhi also believed that the youth could learn self-reliance over self-indulgence from Tolstoy. He said that though there were 'some beautiful currents too, like Tolstoy's life,' overall Modern or Western civilization drew them to 'the path of self-indulgence.' For this reason the youth needed to 'learn the lesson of self-control from Tolstoy's life.'

In fact in his '*Instructions For Satyagrahis*', during the Non-cooperation movement he insisted that in order to preach "the cardinal principles of the doctrine of satyagraha, ... and, with this end in view, literature such as Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, *Hind Swaraj*, *Defence of Socrates* by me, Tolstoy's *Letter to Russian Liberals* and Ruskin's *Unto this Last* should be widely distributed." He went on to say that while this method was frequently used in families to resolve issues, Gandhi's attempt to use the same method at the national level for a political issue was the first such experiment in human history.

In conclusion one can say that the common elements in both Gandhi's and Tolstoy's philosophy were the "law of love", non-violence and anti-militarism. They foregrounded civil disobedience as a cornerstone in civil discourse. Both identified with the marginal sections of society and tried to simplify their own lives in a manner to reflect the lives led by millions of their countrymen. They both emphasised the fact that modern humanity needed to go back to its ethical foundation where the conscience played a more important role than mere man-made laws and conventions. It was the moral authority that resulted from their lives that compelled the world to pay attention to and emulate the ideas both men promulgated.

In his book about Gandhi, Romain Rolland states that "Gandhi is a Tolstoy in a more gentle, appeased, and if I dared, I would say, in a more Christian sense, for Tolstoy is not so much a Christian by nature as by force of will." Furthermore, Tagore draws the following assessment when comparing the two, "Tagore pointed out to me how much more clothed in light and radiance Gandhi's spirit is than Tolstoy's. With Gandhi everything is nature - modest, simple, pure - while his struggles are hallowed by religious serenity, whereas with Tolstoy everything is proud revolt against pride, hatred against hatred, passion against passion. / everything in Tolstoy is violent, even his doctrine of non-violence." A stark contrast between the two writers is their approach to death: while Tolstoy, with his zest and vitality for life is preoccupied by death; it holds no fear for Gandhi. For Gandhi it was only the natural completion of a life. This had an impact on the form that their civil disobedience took. For Tolstoy all forms of organisations, whether political, governmental or patriotic were means of human division. Since he saw them to be contrary to the law of conscience, his attitude was one of non-cooperation and passive resistance. For Gandhi, on the other hand, the very act of non-cooperation was an "intensely active state - more active than physical resistance or violence." His call for non-cooperation was motivated thus: "A government that is evil has no

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room for good men and women except in prison. As no government in the world can possibly put a whole nation in prison, it must yield to its demands or abdicate in favour of a government suited to the nation.” Thus Gandhi only rejected bad government. This has consequences for what he demands of the youth: a constant engagement with issues, a questioning of the government is necessary so that it remains true to its responsibility to the citizens. When a government becomes oppressive and dictatorial it is the responsibility of the youth to resist though non-violence means to reveal the moral bankruptcy of the government and pave the way for its removal. In other ways it was necessary to humanise politics and governance. For this reason Gandhi asked the youth to repudiate and reject competitive and antagonistic kind of patriotism. He said, “The road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my own country and humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. For me patriotism is the same as humanism. I am patriotic because I am human and humane... So my patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace.”

Check Your Progress

1. Give an example of Gandhi’s political activism.
2. What did Gandhi do to unite and mobilise people?
3. What did Gandhi want the youth to understand about resistance?
4. What was a stark contrast between Tolstoy and Gandhi?

7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In one instance where Gandhi refused to vacate his first class seat, he was beaten up and pushed out of the train. This was the moment of his political activism.
2. In an attempt to unite and mobilise the people he interacted with a wide section of the Indian populace such as farmers, urban labourers and the middle classes.
3. According to Gandhi, the youth needed to understand that real resistance did not lie in violent acts of resistance; instead they lay in quiet but steadfast refusals to allow injustices to continue.
4. A stark contrast between the two writers is their approach to death: while Tolstoy, with his zest and vitality for life is preoccupied by death; it holds no fear for Gandhi. For Gandhi it was only the natural completion of a life.

7.5 SUMMARY

- Mahandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar on 2nd October, 1869. During his childhood he was fascinated by characters like Harishchandra who grappled with issues of truth, love and sacrifice.
- Gandhi went on to stay in South Africa for 21 years. It was while he stayed in South Africa that he developed his political and ethical views. His introduction to racial discrimination began in the country when he couldn't sit with other whites because they considered his skin colour to be inferior.
- When the Transvaal Government made laws making registration of people of Chinese and Indian descent mandatory, he tried his idea of satyagraha for the first time. In this he was influenced by Tolstoy's ideas as well.
- Gandhi became the leader of the Indian National Congress in 1921 and led campaigns for poverty alleviation, women's emancipation etc.
- According to Gandhi, Tolstoy's teachings were important since they focused on the idea of non-violence as a means of achieving universal peace. However, Gandhi was clear that this did not imply a succumbing to evil.
- In *Indian Home Rule*, Gandhi wrote, "I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy. Tolstoy has been one of my teachers for a number of years."
- Another salient feature that Gandhi saw in Tolstoy was the veneration of hard labour. According to the writer 'bread labour' was the only way that one could appreciate what was available to one.
- Gandhi also believed that the youth could learn self-reliance over self-indulgence from Tolstoy.
- A stark contrast between the two writers is their approach to death: while Tolstoy, with his zest and vitality for life is preoccupied by death; it holds no fear for Gandhi. For Gandhi it was only the natural completion of a life.

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7.6 KEY WORDS

- **Activism:** It is the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.
- **Skepticism:** It is an attitude of doubt or a disposition to incredulity either in general or toward a particular object.
- **Socialism:** It refers to a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

- **Humanism:** It is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.

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7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. When did Gandhi try his idea of satyagraha for the first time?
2. What was the organising principle of Tolstoy Farm?
3. Why did Annie Besant call Gandhi a “philosophic anarchist like Tolstoy?”
4. Write a short note on Tolstoy’s idea of hard labour.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Elaborate upon Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa that led to the development of his revolutionary spirit.
2. Discuss Gandhi’s ideas on non-violence and its importance for the youth.

7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 8 SIR C.V. RAMAN: ‘WATER: THE ELIXIR OF LIFE’

Sir C.V. Raman:
‘Water: The Elixir of Life’

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Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 About the Author
- 8.3 ‘Water: The Elixir of Life’: Critical Analysis
- 8.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.8 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study the essay called ‘Water: The Elixir of Life’ by C. V. Raman. The essay deals with the significance of water in our lives. C. V. Raman emphasizes in the essay, how without water we cannot imagine life and yet how water is not thought to be so valuable a commodity. By giving his views on water, C. V. Raman is making his readers aware of the ways in which water is essential to human existence and how it is nothing less than a magical potion. In this unit, we will discuss the life and works of C. V. Raman and then move on to the critical appreciation of the essay.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of C. V. Raman
- Analyse the essay ‘Water: The Elixir of Life’
- Describe the significance of water in our lives
- Examine how water is significant for a nation’s development and for the sustenance of humankind

8.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, (7 November 1888 – 21 November 1970) was an Indian physicist and Nobel laureate in Physics well-known for his work on the molecular scattering of light and for the discovery of the Raman effect, which is

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named after him. In 1934 Raman became the Director of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. He also started a company called Travancore Chemical and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. in 1943 along with Dr. Krishnamurthy. The Company during its sixty years history established four factories in Southern India. In 1947, he was appointed as the first National Professor by the new government of Independent India. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society early in his career (1924) and knighted in 1929. In 1930 he won the Nobel Prize in Physics. In 1954 he was awarded the Bharat Ratna. He was also awarded the Lenin Peace Prize in 1957. Raman retired from the Indian Institute of Science in 1948, and a year later he established the Raman Research Institute in Bangalore, Karnataka. He served as its director until his death in 1970, at the age of eighty-two.

Check Your Progress

1. What is C.V.Raman well known for?
2. When did Raman win the Nobel Prize in Physics?

8.3 'WATER: THE ELIXIR OF LIFE': CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The essay 'Water: The Elixir of Life' written by Sir C.V. Raman analyses and discusses in a clear, concise, and scientific manner the nature and properties of water and its significance in the life of human beings. C.V. Raman begins the essay with his remark on how human beings have always sought for an imaginary elixir of life while neglecting and taking for granted the real elixir of life which is nothing but common water.

He gives the example of the Libyan Desert and the Valley of the Nile. Though both of them lie side by side, the first is a dry and arid desert while the latter is one of the most fertile valleys on this planet. The presence of the river Nile in the Valley of Nile is responsible for this huge difference between the two places. He in fact remarks that the entire civilization of Egypt was nurtured and sustained by the life-giving waters of the Nile.

Raman points out how the presence of water adds to the beauty of the countryside. The rain-fed tanks apart from quenching the thirst of human beings, animals, and plants, add life, colour, and vigour to the landscape. They are a very common sight in South India and play a very important role in nurturing the agricultural development of the region.

The author first mentions that one important property of water is its ability to carry silt or finely divided soil in suspension. These particles are carried over great distances and get deposited when the salt water of the sea mixes with the freshwater of the river in the delta areas. Large tracts of fertile alluvial land are formed in this manner. Thus water plays a pivotal role in promoting agriculture,

and making the entire region fertile and full of greenery. But the very same agency can play a destructive role when it is present in excess, notes Raman. Soil erosion is one such phenomenon. It is a major problem in countries like India. It occurs when the top layer of the soil is washed away in successive steps by the action of water. It is mainly caused by sudden bursts of heavy rainfall, the slope of the land, removal of the natural protective coat of vegetation, the existence of ruts along which water can flow rapidly, and the absence of any checks to prevent the flow of water. Raman mentions that it can be checked using various preventive measures like the terracing of land, the construction of bunds to check the flow of water, the practice of contour cultivation, and the planting of appropriate types of vegetation.

C.V. Raman then points out that water is the basis for all forms of life. Hence the need of the hour is to conserve and properly harness all available water resources. In countries like India where agricultural production is mainly dependent on seasonal rainfall, this becomes a burning issue. Raman suggests the adoption of techniques which help in preventing and controlling soil erosion in order to conserve and harness water for useful purposes. This would prevent the water from the seasonal rainfall from running off the ground. He suggests the practice of afforestation and the planting of civilized forests to check soil erosion, conserve rain water, and provide cheap supplies of fuel.

Raman also mentions the idea of promoting internal waterways as a cheap and economical means of transport because a country like India has a large number of water bodies which can be used for navigation. He also supports the idea of using water resources to produce hydroelectric power. This would improve the rural economy, and help in tapping the ground water resources to a greater extent.

Hence Raman concludes by saying that though water is the commonest of liquids because of its easy availability, it is the most uncommon of liquids because it has the unique power of maintaining animal and plant life. Thus the study of its nature and properties is of highest scientific interest.

Critical Analysis

Water is the most significant liquid in the world as it is similar to that of life. Can one think of life without water? Can you live without water as you cannot live without oxygen? Water is so significant in the beginning, development and perpetuation of the world, the plants, the animal world as well as the humankind that there are no two opinions about its importance. C. V. Raman's essay 'Water – the Elixir of Life' seems to be a justification on the significance of water in the development of whole of the humankind.

But before going into the thematic aspects of the essay, it is necessary that we understand a little bit about the genre of the essay. What is of much significance in the present essay 'Water – An Elixir of Life' is that C. V. Raman with his scholarly insights has made the essay a pleasurable reading. Often a didactic essay on water may make the readers feel bored while reading the essay; but C. V. Raman with his choice of vocabulary and phrases as well as his syntactical constructions has

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written the essay in such a manner that often one enjoys reading the essay. It is to be kept in mind here that an essay necessarily talks about a topic / theme in such a way that the readers find themselves with some new information while reading the essay or they enjoy the process of reading itself. In the case of 'Water – An Elixir of Life', both the cases are served while reading the essay.

Another notable feature of the essay 'Water – An Elixir of Life' is that as the essay is written for the general public, therefore even though it explains things in a scientific manner; it does not use the scientific jargons at all. The choice of language is very important in an essay as on it depends who is going to read the essay. In other words, the language of the essay determines or chooses its readers. If the language is technical or scientific then a specific kind of readers can be addressed through that language; while if the language is general as it is in 'Water – An Elixir of Life', a greater readership is available to the essay. Here it is also important to understand that C. V. Raman wanted more and more people to know about the significance of water in their lives and therefore he consciously and deliberately chose a language which suits the purpose of the general readers who would not have to struggle with the language.

With this little discussion on the nature of the essay, let us now again move back to its theme – the significance of water in our lives. C. V. Raman begins the essay in an interesting way, by saying –

Man has through the ages sought in vain for an imaginary elixir of life, the divine *amrita*, a draught of which was thought to confer immortality. But the true elixir of life lies near to our hands. For it is the commonest of all liquids, plain water!

What is interesting about this beginning as well as the title of the essay is the use of the word 'elixir.' Elixir means 'a magical (sometimes also used in the sense of medicinal) potion' that guarantees an immortal life. We can see that often in western alchemy, there are mentions of bogus scientists who have tried to find that magical elixir and even in the Indian context, the notion of *amrita* is very familiar to all of us as being a potion which if drunk will possibly provide us with immortality, as also being pointed out by C. V. Raman. What is significant to mention here is that in the perusal of this magical potion, humankind has forgotten that what is available to them – 'the plain water' – is nothing less than the elixir.

Thus the title of the essay as well as the beginning of the essay provides us with a new way of looking at water: the most common things around us, yet most valuable. Often we with our short sightedness are not able to have a proper understanding of the significance of water in our lives. So the essay 'Water – An Elixir of Life' in one way propounds what the title as the beginning of the essay states. The essay is written just to explain why water should be treated as the most valuable object and that one should make all efforts not to waste it in any way if one is looking forward to national development, or progress and sustenance of the humankind.

C. V. Raman beautifully gives the anecdote of how a civilization has become possible because of water. He writes –

I remember one day standing on the line which separates the Libyan Desert from the Valley of the Nile in Egypt. On one side was a visible sea of billowing sand without a speck of green or a single living thing anywhere visible on it. On the other side lay one of the greatest, most fertile and densely populated areas to be found anywhere on the earth, teeming with life and vegetation. What made this wonderful difference? Why, it is the water of river Nile flowing down to the Mediterranean from its sources a couple of thousands of miles away ... Egypt, in fact was made by its river. Its ancient civilization was created and sustained by the life-giving waters which come down year after year with unfailing regularity.

The above anecdote is truly inspiring in terms of our understanding of the significance of water. It is only the water of the Nile river which has made the Egyptian civilization possible; otherwise things would have been very much like the Libyan Desert.

Think about India, why is it that all the prosperous civilizations in India developed around the rivers – starting from the Indus Valley Civilization. All civilizations across the world has developed near the waterways for at least two reasons –

- (a) Water is equal to life, wherever there is water; humankind found it fit for settlement, as agriculture could be done in a much more fruitful way in the riverbanks. The rivers carrying with it the silts make the land fertile and helped people in agricultural activities.
- (b) Trade and Commerce also developed along the river as waterways could be used as a medium of transport.

Therefore, C. V. Raman states – ‘It (water) has played a role of vast significance in shaping the course of earth’s history and continues to play the leading role in the drama of life on the surface of our planet.’ In other words, life is only possible on earth because of the presence of water. If there would have been no water, there would not have been any history of humankind as man’s existence will not be possible without adequate water.

Then C. V. Raman gives the details of ‘rain-fed tanks’ of water, i.e., the ponds that one sees in abundance in southern part of India. He talks about them in the following terms –

The rain-fed tanks that are so common in South India – alas often so sadly neglected in their maintenance – are a cheering sight when they are full. ... Water in a landscape may be compared to the eyes in a human race.

After talking about the rain-fed tanks, C. V. Raman talks about the power to water to carry silts or finely divided soil in suspension. These silts provide the colour to the water and therefore the colour of the water varies from place to place. To talk about it vividly, C. V. Raman gives the example of change in colour of water as one journeys from a great river towards the sea –

This can be readily seen when one travels by a steamer down a great river to the deep sea. The colour of the water changes successively from the muddy red or brown of silt through varying shades of yellow and green finally to the blue of the deep sea.

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After talking about the colour of water due to the presence of slits, C. V. Raman goes into the discussion of the geological process by which soil is formed on the earth's surface from the rocks of its crust because of the power of the flow of water. If because of the carriage of silt and its sedimentation in the river's banks can lead to the formulation of human settlements and great civilizations across the world, then because of the problem of soil erosion it can easily play a destructive part in the history of civilization.

Regarding soil erosion, C. V. Raman states –

Soil erosion occurs in successive steps, the earliest of which may easily pass unnoticed. In the later stages, the cutting up and washing away of the earth is only painfully apparent in the formation of deep gullies and ravines which make all agriculture impossible. Sudden bursts of excessively heavy rain resulting in a large surplus of water are the principal factors in causing soil erosion. Contributory causes are the slope of the land, removal of the natural preventive coat of vegetation, the existence of ruts along which water can flow with rapidly gathering momentum, and the absence of checks of such flow. Incredibly large quantities of precious soil can be washed away if such conditions exist, as is unhappily too often the case.

This kind of soil erosion which C. V. Raman mentions in the earlier quoted portion is really a cause of concern for a country like India which is full of rivers. If India has to get over this menace of soil erosion then according to C. V. Raman 'preventive actions' are immediately necessary. C. V. Raman talks about the following preventive actions –

- (a) The terracing of land
- (b) Construction of bunds to check the flow of water
- (c) The practice of contour cultivation
- (d) Planting of appropriate vegetation, etc.

After discussing the topic of soil erosion, C. V. Raman goes into the discussion of the need for the conservation and proper utilization of water so as to make the human civilization sustain for a longer time.

In India, seasonal rainfall is one of the greatest factors on which Indian agriculture is dependent. Therefore, C. V. Raman says 'The harnessing of our rivers, the waters of which now mostly run to waste, is a great national problem which must be considered and dealt with on national lines.' If water is used in proper ways in India, then, according to C. V. Raman the vast acres of land which at present is scrub jungle can be turned into fertile land for the development of our nation. In other words, the prosperity of our nation depends on the successful implementation of well-planned actions of conservation and proper uses of water.

C. V. Raman is of the opinion that if along with the utilization of water, afforestation programmes are successfully implemented then it would lead to –

- (a) Check soil erosion
- (b) Conserve the rainfall from flowing away as waste

- (c) Supply cheap fuel
- (d) Farming and manure
- (e) Cheapest form of internal transport (by boats and barges through canals and rivers)
- (f) Development of hydro-electric power, especially useful for the rural economy.

Thus C. V. Raman shows that water and its right utilization can lead to prosperity and development of our nation. Therefore he ends the essay by saying

In one sense, water is the commonest of liquids. In another sense, it is the most uncommon of liquids with amazing properties which are responsible for its unique power of maintaining animal and plant life.

Water is thus presented by C. V. Raman as the liquid which is the most significant for human existence. As we see water in abundance all around us we do not seem to value it so much. We feel that it is there and therefore it has no value. But in reality, it is the most valuable liquid available to humankind.

C. V. Raman thus had made a brief but incisive discourse on the need of water, its conservation and proper utilization so that humankind is aware of the problems related to water. One thing that he probably hasn't dealt with is the shortage of water in human life. In these days, often during summer months there are severe shortage of water. One of the greatest examples in India is the shortage of water in Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh in 2018 summer months when the taps of the city went dry for many days. If water is not preserved, conserved and utilized in the proper way, then the day is not far when we will not have enough water to sustain our humankind.

Check Your Progress

- 3. Which example is given by Raman to indicate the importance of water at the beginning of the essay?
- 4. How can soil erosion be prevented as per Raman?
- 5. State the factor which determines or chooses the readers of an essay.
- 6. What provides colour to the water as per Raman?

8.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

- 1. Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, (7 November 1888 – 21 November 1970) was an Indian physicist and Nobel laureate in Physics well-known for his work on the molecular scattering of light and for the discovery of the Raman effect, which is named after him.

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2. Raman won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930.
3. Raman gives the example of the Libyan Desert and the Valley of the Nile to indicate the importance of water at the beginning of the essay.
4. Raman mentions that soil erosion can be checked using various preventive measures like the terracing of land, the construction of bunds to check the flow of water, the practice of contour cultivation, and the planting of appropriate types of vegetation.
5. The language of the essay determines or chooses its readers.
6. As per Raman, silts provide the colour to the water and therefore the colour of the water varies from place to place.

8.5 SUMMARY

- Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, (7 November 1888 – 21 November 1970) was an Indian physicist and Nobel laureate in Physics well-known for his work on the molecular scattering of light and for the discovery of the Raman effect, which is named after him.
- The essay 'Water: The Elixir of Life' written by Sir C.V. Raman analyses and discusses in a clear, concise, and scientific manner the nature and properties of water and its significance in the life of human beings.
- C.V. Raman begins the essay with his remark on how human beings have always sought for an imaginary elixir of life while neglecting and taking for granted the real elixir of life which is nothing but common water.
- One important property of water is its ability to carry silt or finely divided soil in suspension. These particles are carried over great distances and get deposited when the salt water of the sea mixes with the freshwater of the river in the delta areas. Large tracts of fertile alluvial land are formed in this manner.
- Soil erosion is a major problem in countries like India. It occurs when the top layer of the soil is washed away in successive steps by the action of water. It is mainly caused by sudden bursts of heavy rainfall, the slope of the land, removal of the natural protective coat of vegetation, the existence of ruts along which water can flow rapidly, and the absence of any checks to prevent the flow of water.
- Raman suggests the practice of afforestation and the planting of civilized forests to check soil erosion, conserve rain water, and provide cheap supplies of fuel.

- Raman concludes by saying that though water is the commonest of liquids because of its easy availability, it is the most uncommon of liquids because it has the unique power of maintaining animal and plant life. Thus the study of its nature and properties is of highest scientific interest.

*Sir C.V. Raman:
'Water: The Elixir of Life'*

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8.6 KEY WORDS

- **Silt:** It refers to fine sand, clay, or other material carried by running water and deposited as a sediment, especially in a channel or harbour.
- **Fertile:** It refers to the soil producing or capable of producing abundant vegetation or crops.
- **Elixir:** It means 'a magical (sometimes also used in the sense of medicinal) potion' that guarantees an immortal life.
- **Soil Erosion:** It occurs when the top layer of the soil is washed away in successive steps by the action of water.

8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the various accolades received by C.V. Raman.
2. Briefly explain the destructive role of water when it is present in excess.
3. How does water play a pivotal role in promoting agriculture?
4. Briefly discuss the title of the essay.
5. 'All civilizations across the world has developed near the waterways for at least two reasons'. State the two reasons.
6. List the benefits of afforestation programmes as per Raman.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the significance of water based on what you have gathered from C. V. Raman's essay 'Water – An Elixir of Life'.
2. Explain how soil erosion occurs and the chief ways to avert it.
3. Elaborate upon the measure suggested by C.V. Raman to control the movement of water in order to harness it for useful purposes.
4. Analyse the role played by water in shaping humankind's history.

Sir C.V. Raman:
'Water: The Elixir of Life'

8.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 9 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: 'KAMALA NEHRU'

Jawaharlal Nehru:
'Kamala Nehru'

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Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 About the Author
- 9.3 'Kamala Nehru': Critical Analysis
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, is known not only for his contribution to the Indian freedom struggle but also for his literary acumen. His insight about his experiences finds expression in *The Discovery of India*. Through his writing on Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru praised the former's sense of dignity and spirited participation in the freedom struggle. This unit will discuss in detail the essay on Kamala Nehru while also highlighting the need for women's participation in issues of national importance. The unit will also examine the life of

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Jawaharlal Nehru's contribution to the Indian freedom struggle
- Examine the literary style of Jawaharlal Nehru
- Analyse Kamala Nehru's participation in the Indian freedom struggle
- Explain Jawaharlal's Nehru essay on Kamala Nehru

9.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India was born on 14 November 1889 in Allahabad. He was a central figure in the freedom movement. His father Motilal Nehru was a barrister and was the President of the Indian National Congress in 1919 and 1920. His mother came from a Kashmiri Brahmin family settled in Lahore. Nehru was the eldest of three siblings; his elder sister Vijay Lakshmi was the first female president of the UN general assembly and his younger

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sister Krishna Hutheesing was a noted writer. Nehru spent his childhood in the palatial confines of Anand Bhawan where he was educated at home by governesses and tutors. Annie Beasant, a family friend introduced him to the Theosophical Society. The nationalist instinct had always been present in young Nehru; they became more pronounced in the aftermath of the Second Boer War and the Russo Japanese War. Trevelyan's Garibaldi books was a great influence on him during his years at Harrow. He graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge with a degree in natural sciences in 1910. He went on to study law at the Inner Temple Inn and was called to the bar in 1912. During this time, he came into contact with scholars of the Fabian Society like Beatrice Webb.

On his return to India, Nehru began practicing as an advocate in the Allahabad High Court. However, he did not like practicing the law or interacting with his fellow colleagues. As the years went by, his involvement in the freedom struggle became more important than his legal practice. In fact, he first attended the Indian National Congress session in Patna in 1912. The preponderance of 'an English knowing upper-class' in the party made him extremely uncomfortable. Even though he had doubts about joining the Congress, Nehru began working with Gandhi in support of the Indian civil rights movement in Africa. At the outbreak of the First World War, he volunteered for St John ambulance and worked as a provincial secretary for the organisation in Allahabad. Many believe that he emerged as a Radical after the war. Nehru was convinced that the Congress should demand independence. However, Moderates like his own father and Gokhale did not agree with this view and said that it was 'madness to think of independence'. The tussle between the Moderates and the radical wing of the party continued until the death of Gokhale in 1915. Though a proposal for home-rule was tabled in the Congress, it was defeated because the Moderates balked at the idea.

Nehru's first real involvement in the national movement was seen in the non-cooperation movement of 1920. He was the leader of the movement in present day Uttar Pradesh and was arrested in 1921. Suspension of the non-cooperation movement after the incident of Chauri Chaura did not make him question his role in national politics. He played an integral role in developing an international outlook for the struggle. His attempts to enter internationalize the movement succeeded and the Congress was invited to join the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels, Belgium in 1927. Nehru viewed the independence movement as a multinational exercise since he believed that all colonies of European powers needed to be free.

Nehru's version of India is seen in the 1929 document of the Congress where it was stated that the aim of the party was to achieve freedom of religion, freedom of expression of thought, equality of law irrespective of cost colour creed or gender, protection of regional languages and cultures, and the establishment of a secular country. Moreover, he was the first leader to explicitly state that the aim of the Congress should be to establish a complete break from British rule. This was stated in the 1927 Madras session of the Congress, despite Gandhi's

objections. He hoisted the tricolour for the first time in Lahore in 1929 after the British refused to grant Dominion status to India. He also participated in the Dandi March. The 1930s witnessed rising tensions in Europe. Nehru was in the continent since his wife was recovering in a medical facility in Switzerland. She died there in 1936. Anticipating the inevitable war, Nehru stated that India would fight alongside Britain and France but only if it was a free country. The party resolved to participate in the provincial elections of 1937 and emerged with a majority. The Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah came a distant second. Nehru, unlike Gandhi, was convinced that Maulana Azad, and not Jinnah, was the voice of Indian Muslims. He was also the first nationalist leader to take cognizance of the sufferings of people in princely states of India and took up their cause as well.

The advent of the Second World War forced the British to negotiate with Congress in order to ensure the participation of Indian soldiers. In return, the party demanded the assurance of the British that India would be granted independence once the war ended. When the British refused to comply, Nehru and Gandhi launched a Civil Disobedience Campaign in 1940. The unfolding of the War, the rising insistence on the creation of Pakistan meant that the Cripps Mission of 1942 failed to resolve issues. This resulted in the Quit India Movement of 1942. As a result, the entire Congress leadership was arrested and put behind bars in Ahmednagar Fort until 15 June 1945. In the absence of a credible Congress leadership, the Muslim league gained power and took over the governments in Bengal and the North-West Frontier Province in 1943. The Bengal famine had a disastrous impact and lot of people blamed the Muslim League for the mishandling of the famine. Jinnah's reduced political stature received impetus when Gandhi met him and offered a plebiscite.

As talks about an independent India gained strength, Nehru turned his attention to the princely states and argued that they could challenge independent India on the basis of their military might. In 1947, Nehru declared that the new Republic would reject all arguments pertaining to the divine right of kings. Any princely state that it refused to join the republic would be seen as an enemy and dealt with accordingly. Patel and Menon were able to find an amicable solution and were successful in integrating these states into the republic. Nehru headed the interim government which oversaw the transfer of power. It was only when all talks with Jinnah broke down that reluctant Nehru agreed to the partition of India in June 1947. He took oath as the first prime minister of independent India on 15 August 1947 where he delivered his famous 'tryst with the destiny' speech in the Parliament. Another famous speech by Nehru was his address to the nation when Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist affiliated with the extremist Hindu Mahasabha, assassinated Gandhi on 30 January 1928. He said, 'the light has gone out of our lives, and there is darkness everywhere, and I do not quite know what to tell you or how to say it... we will not run to him for advice or seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow, not only for me, and but for millions and millions in this country.'

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The leaders oversaw the partition of India into a secular India and a Muslim Pakistan, the merging of the 12 princely states into the Indian union between 1947 and 1950, and the adoption of the Constitution on 26 January 1950. Nehru died on 27 May 1964 due to a heart attack.

Check Your Progress

1. Who introduced Nehru to the Theosophical Society?
2. In which year was the Civil Disobedience Campaign launched?
3. Who, according to Nehru, was the real voice of the Muslims?

9.3 'KAMALA NEHRU': CRITICAL ANALYSIS

On being asked about India, Nehru had once replied: 'Gandhi is India'. The same cannot be said about Nehru. Though it is clear that he played a central role in Indian history, especially in the days following the anti-Rowlatt Act demonstrations, Nehru often confessed to being bewildered by the country. In many aspects, the country was alien to him. Nonetheless in many cases, the history of India is the life of Nehru. However when one considers him as a writer, the words of American journalist Edgar Snow turn prescient. Snow said that Nehru's autobiography was 'not only indispensable to any student of Asia, it is among the treasure of English literature'. Einstein called *The Discovery of India* a 'marvellous book' and Tom Wintringham wrote that *Glimpses of World History* gave a better understanding of both history and English than Macaulay. It is ironic that Nehru's contributions in nation building and his stature as a political leader on the world stage have obfuscated his role as writer and a man of learning.

Nehru's writings span years and topics. One common theme in his writings is the foregrounding of India's diversity and the necessity of preserving the same if the country is to stay united. He did not find the divergences in dialects, dress, religious beliefs and practices confusing; instead he celebrates them in his writings. Another facet of his writing is the veneration of Gandhi. Nehru's respect for science and his belief that it would solve all of man's problems, including the blind faith in religion is another strain that appears in his writings. If one considers that most of Nehru's writings was done while he was in prison during the course of the freedom struggle, it is remarkable that he could sustain the spirit of scientific enquiry and rigorous thinking and celebrate it without reverting to the clichés of bland religious belief. In fact, he wrote, 'What a useful place prison is in which to do good work!' In his work, we also see a realization that just as the heroes of Indian antiquity had to suffer trials and tribulations in exile, the modern Indian had to undergo the travails of life in prison in order to ensure that the ideas of freedom, equality and justice could find their place in the public discourse. Nehru conceded the point that he also wrote to keep himself mentally agile and fit while he was in prison. His writings on history for his daughter were aimed at convincing her that history was

more than mere dates and individuals; it comprised individuals who went beyond themselves and achieved what seemed almost fantastical. He wrote about history ‘to awaken [your] curiosity’.

Nehru’s writing style is marked in its simplicity, the use of commonplace words, short sentences and concrete ideas. In his writing, he was always conscious of his intended readers and wrote accordingly: even while writing about complex issues, he tried to reconcile the claims of macro issues with micro issues. His writings also reveal his intrinsic love of the language. Nevertheless, he was aware that English was not the native language of the country. In fact, he wrote to his daughter Indira saying, ‘the only way for people to grow . . . is through their own language’ and that it was ‘ridiculous’ that he had to write in English. However, he hoped that one day ‘we shall get out this habit soon’. His writings also reveal a pride in his Indianness. For example, he was extremely unhappy with the Anglicization of Indian names. He wrote to the English historian Edward Thompson, ‘I hope you will not use the name “Ganges”. I dislike it. “Ganga” sounds infinity better. I wonder how your forebears managed to change the good name into “Ganges”.’ His exuberance for the language is reflected in his prose style and in his curiosity about languages. In other words, he was fascinated by the uses of language and the receptive and oppressive ways in which it could be utilized.

In his autobiography, Nehru describes his marriage in one sentence: ‘My marriage took place in 1916 in the city of Delhi.’ His wife is not mentioned by name. Similarly, Indira’s birth finds no mention. Indira finds mention only when she is 4 years old and is out of the cradle. The absence of these women from the autobiography is jarring. Though he doesn’t mention Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal does praise her sense of dignity and her spirited participation in the freedom struggle. He confesses that he was so engrossed in the freedom movement that he often ignored his wife and ‘left her to her own resources’. She was a frail woman, prone to sickness and Nehru acknowledges that ‘she must have suffered and felt a little neglected. An unkindness to her would almost have been better than this semi forgetful, casual attitude.’ His frequent and long stints in prison, coupled with Kamal Nehru’s frail health meant that the couple never really got to know each other very well. When the two got married, Kamala Nehru was an extremely shy girl who was barely educated. She was clearly uncomfortable in the social family like the Nehrus. Her family was more traditional and orthodox. Her father in law, Motilal Nehru trained her before marriage to become more comfortable in the new role she would take. Over the course of her life, this shy undistinguished girl morphed into a brave and politically active freedom fighter who was a source of inspiration and support for her husband Jawaharlal. It was her support, in the face of Motilal Nehru’s apprehensions, that gave Jawaharlal the confidence to commit himself for the cause of independence. She showed immense resolution and forbearance every time he was imprisoned by the British. When he was in prison, Kamala Nehru toured villages and gave speeches about the movement. In fact, when she was sick in 1934, the British offered to release Nehru if he assured them that he would

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refrain from any kind of political involvement. Nehru refused despite knowing that his presence would alleviate Kamala's anxiety. He knew that she would reject the compromise that was being asked of him. When Nehru was later allowed to visit her she asked him, 'What is this about you giving assurance to Government? Do not give it.'

Nehru writes about Kamala Nehru in some detail in chapter two of *The Discovery of India* titled 'Badenweiler, Lausanne'. It is the shortest chapter in the book. It is in the form of an interlude and is highly personal and abstract in nature. This chapter focuses on Nehru's discovery of the nature of the relationship between the couple. Though he wrote the Preface to his *Autobiography* two months before Kamala Nehru's death, she finds no mention there. This chapter however centers on Kamala; it brings the narrative of their relationship to her death. He wrote this chapter when he was imprisoned in Ahmadnagar Fort in 1944. It was during this period that he was beginning to realize what his wife meant to him. Simultaneously, he grappled with the issue of whether one could know another person completely. 'What was Kamala? Did I know her? Understand her real self? Did she know or understand me? For I too was an abnormal person with mystery and unplumbed depths within me, which I could not fathom myself.' These lines reveal his anguish at an unfulfilled relationship as well as his awe at the nuances of relationships. The possibility of loss and the potential for greater discovery are both present here. The realization that his wife, who might have been a silent presence in his life, is no longer alive makes him understand the fundamental importance of human relationships. He realizes that all human endeavour is meaningless if it is not predicated on the support, development and protection of the people around us. But as Nehru writes, this realization is 'often ignored in our fierce arguments about politics and economics'. Thus, it is clear that the charge that Nehru was not impacted by news of Kamala Nehru's death isn't accurate. Though they never got to know each other intimately, she did play a critical role in apprising him of the freedom struggle and the need for resistance. He felt her absence deeply and lamented the loss of a relationship that could have been but would never be. He says so much when he acknowledges the difficulty he felt in writing about her: 'There is an intimacy about one's inner life, one's feelings and thoughts, which may not and cannot be conveyed to others.' The way Nehru approaches the relationship makes it clear that it mattered to him and that he was uncomfortable in putting it under the scanner for the general reading public. It is interesting to note that he doesn't shy away from revealing the development of his political thought but he is extremely hesitant talking about his personal life in great detail.

The difficulty in knowing the other, in this case his wife, is reflected in the difficulty Nehru faces in reconciling the diverse strains of the national ethos. Nehru found it strange that a country whose religious thinkers and philosophers espoused the value of peace and ahimsa could butcher each other so easily in the name of religion. It was striking that people who venerated the cow could kill fellow humans with impunity. He was puzzled, bewildered and anguished by what he saw around

him even as he attempted to know the country and its people. It was the paradoxes that held him spellbound.

Nehru's acknowledgement of Kamala Nehru's role in the freedom struggle also needs to be seen in light of the place Gandhi accorded women in the movement. While it cannot be denied that it was on Gandhi's call that several women came out of their homes to participate in the non-violent movement, it is also true that their physical presence while picketing, boycotting, etc. added another dimension to the movement. Nevertheless Gandhi envisioned the participation of women in the movement in a very limited sense. He recognized that women's ability to suffer stoically and silently in a non-violent manner would lend credence to the movement, but he was wary of giving them a broader role. He wanted to tap into their dissatisfaction with British rule and keep it targeted only at the colonial masters. Therefore, he attempted to ensure that their participation in the movement remained within the confines of 'the politics of respectability', as Geraldine Forbes called it. Though Gandhi believed in equality, he also contended that there were separate roles for men and women in society. Thus, they needed to have different vocations. He said 'equality of sexes does not mean equality of occupation'. So, even though he drew women into the freedom struggle, he did not espouse any ideas of socio-economic equality for them. Instead, his programmes included women in activities like spinning and women's groups were confined to traditional roles of self-defacement and silent suffering like Sita. In contrast, for Nehru, the increasing participation of women in the freedom movement was tantamount to a social revolution. It could break traditional norms and give women agency and a new cause they could devote themselves to. He could see the impact of this in his own home: it was on Gandhi's call that his wife Kamala Nehru threw herself in to the freedom struggle. Explaining her involvement Nehru wrote: 'She wanted to play her own part in the national struggle and not merely be a hanger-on and a shadow of her husband. She wanted to justify herself to her own self as well as to the world.'

Nehru regards his wife as a separate entity with a mind of her own. He considered this an important moment in India since it would ensure that women would one day soon find their place under the sun and achieve equality with men. In this, Nehru reveals a greater willingness to renegotiate relations between the sexes than Gandhi. Thus, the regret that he feels at the passing of his wife becomes even more poignant: it deprives him the opportunity to negotiate this in his personal life. His admiration for his wife and the women of India is evident in his writings where he expresses confidence in their ability. One can see that he did not begrudge his wife's participation in the freedom movement since he saw it as the precursor of their willingness to fight for their own rights: 'no people, no group, no community, no country has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor. . . the women of India will not attain their full rights by the mere generosity of the men of India. They will have to fight for them and force their will on the menfolk before they can succeed.'

*Jawaharlal Nehru:
'Kamala Nehru'*

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Check Your Progress

4. In which chapter of *The Discovery of India* does Jawaharlal Nehru mention his wife Kamala Nehru?
5. Who called *The Discovery of India* a 'marvellous book'?

9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Annie Beasant, a family friend of Nehru introduced him to the Theosophical Society.
2. The Civil Disobedience Campaign was launched in 1940.
3. According to Nehru, Maulana Azad was the real voice of the Muslims.
4. Nehru writes about Kamala Nehru in some detail in chapter two of *The Discovery of India* titled 'Badenweiler, Lausanne'.
5. Einstein called *The Discovery of India* a 'marvellous book'.

9.5 SUMMARY

- Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India was born on 14 November 1889 in Allahabad. He was a central figure in the freedom movement. His father Motilal Nehru was a barrister and was the President of the Indian National Congress in 1919 and 1920. His mother came from a Kashmiri Brahmin family settled in Lahore.
- Annie Beasant, a family friend introduced him to the Theosophical Society. The nationalist instinct had always been present in young Nehru; they became more pronounced in the aftermath of the Second Boer War and the Russo Japanese War.
- Nehru graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge with a degree in natural sciences in 1910. He went on to study law at the Inner Temple Inn and was called to the bar in 1912.
- On his return to India, Nehru began practicing as an advocate in the Allahabad High Court. Even though he had doubts about joining the Congress, Nehru began working with Gandhi in support of the Indian civil rights movement in Africa.
- At the outbreak of the First World War, he volunteered for St John ambulance and worked as a provincial secretary for the organisation in Allahabad. Many believe that he emerged as a Radical after the war. Nehru was convinced that the Congress should demand independence.

- Nehru's first real involvement in the national movement was seen in the non-cooperation movement of 1920. He was the leader of the movement in present day Uttar Pradesh and was arrested in 1921.
- The 1930s witnessed rising tensions in Europe. Nehru was in the continent since his wife was recovering in a medical facility in Switzerland. She died there in 1936.
- The advent of the Second World War forced the British to negotiate with Congress in order to ensure the participation of Indian soldiers. In return, the party demanded the assurance of the British that India would be granted independence once the war ended. When the British refused to comply, Nehru and Gandhi launched a Civil Disobedience Campaign in 1940.
- As talks about an independent India gained strength. Nehru turned his attention to the princely states and declared that the new Republic would reject all arguments pertaining to the divine right of kings. Any princely state that it refused to join the republic would be seen as an enemy and dealt with accordingly.
- Nehru took oath as the first prime minister of independent India on 15 August 1947 where he delivered his famous 'tryst with the destiny' speech in the Parliament.
- One common theme in Nehru's writings is the foregrounding of India's diversity and the necessity of preserving the same if the country is to stay united. He did not find the divergences in dialects, dress, religious beliefs and practices confusing; instead he celebrates them in his writings. Another facet of his writing is the veneration of Gandhi. Nehru's respect for science and his belief that it would solve all of man's problems, including the blind faith in religion is another strain that appears in his writings.
- Nehru's writing style is marked in its simplicity, the use of commonplace words, short sentences and concrete ideas. His writings also reveal his intrinsic love of the language. Nevertheless, he was aware that English was not the native language of the country.
- In his autobiography, Nehru describes his marriage in one sentence: 'My marriage took place in 1916 in the city of Delhi.' His wife is not mentioned by name. . Though he doesn't mention Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal does praise her sense of dignity and her spirited participation in the freedom struggle.
- Nehru confesses that he was so engrossed in the freedom movement that he often ignored his wife and 'left her to her own resources'. She was a frail woman, prone to sickness and Nehru acknowledges that 'she must have suffered and felt a little neglected.'
- Nehru writes about Kamala Nehru in some detail in chapter two of *The Discovery of India* titled 'Badenweiler, Lausanne'. It is the shortest chapter

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in the book. It is in the form of an interlude and is highly personal and abstract in nature. This chapter focuses on Nehru's discovery of the nature of the relationship between the couple.

- Nehru wrote the chapter on Kamala Nehru when he was imprisoned in Ahmadnagar Fort in 1944. It was during this period that he was beginning to realize what his wife meant to him.
- Nehru's acknowledgement of Kamala Nehru's role in the freedom struggle also needs to be seen in light of the place Gandhi accorded women in the movement. Gandhi recognized that women's ability to suffer stoically and silently in a non-violent manner would lend credence to the movement, but he was wary of giving them a broader role.
- For Nehru, the increasing participation of women in the freedom movement was tantamount to a social revolution. It could break traditional norms and give women agency and a new cause they could devote themselves to.

9.6 KEY WORDS

- **Plebiscite:** It refers to a vote by the people of a country or a region on a question that is very important.
- **Civil Disobedience:** It is the active, professed refusal of a citizen to obey certain laws, of a government. It is sometimes equated with peaceful protests or nonviolent resistance.
- **Dialect:** It is a form of a language that is spoken in one area of a country.
- **Autobiography:** It is a self-written account of one's life.

9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the writing style of Jawaharlal Nehru.
2. Briefly mention Nehru's opinion of the use of English language in writings.
3. Write a short note on Kamala Nehru's participation in the Indian freedom struggle.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain Nehru's participation in the Indian freedom struggle.
2. Discuss the difference in how Nehru and Gandhi viewed women's participation in the Indian freedom struggle.

9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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*Jawaharlal Nehru:
'Kamala Nehru'*

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BLOCK - III
DRAMA

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UNIT 10 MAHESH DATTANI: *SEVEN STEPS AROUND FIRE*

Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 About the Author
- 10.3 *Seven Steps Around Fire*: Critical Analysis
- 10.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is an Indian playwright and director born in Bangalore in 1958. He is accredited with the writing of several remarkable plays such as *Where there's a Will, Final Solutions, 30 days in September* among others. In this unit, we will discuss one of his notable plays called *Seven Steps Around Fire* which focuses on the plight of individuals who are marginalised by society. They are denied the right to choose a path for themselves and live a life of freedom and dignity. Dattani raises several other important and serious questions that question the privileged who hold power and use it to suppress the underprivileged.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the early life and career of Mahesh Dattani
- Analyse the play *Seven Steps Around Fire* by Mahesh Dattani

10.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore to Gujarati parents on 7th August, 1958. He studied in Baldwin Boys High School and went on to complete his higher education from Saint Joseph's College, Bangalore. He studied economics, history

and political science in college. Since he wanted to become a copywriter, he completed his post-graduation in marketing and advertising management. During this time he worked with the Bangalore Little Theatre. Here he performed in Utpal Dutt's *Surya Shikhar*. Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was a major influence early on and inspired him to try his hand at writing. Madhu Rye's *Kumarni Agashi* further inspired him to try playwriting.

Dattani's first full-length play *Where there's a Will* was written in 1986, since then he has worked full time in theatre. His directorial debut was *Mango Soufflé*, an adaptation of his own play. *Morning Raaga* was also directed by him.

Dattani won the Sahitya Academy award for *Final solutions and other plays*. *Final Solutions*, *Tara* and *30 Days in September* were also selected for the Sahitya Kala Parishad over the years. His movie *Dance Like a Man* was awarded the Best Picture award by National Panorama in 1998. Alyque Padamsee has described Dattani as "a playwright who gives 60 million English speaking Indians an identity."

Dattani's plays deal with contemporary issues and tragedies like communal tension, homosexual love and marriage, child abuse, and the problems of patriarchy. Despite the trials and tribulations his characters face, they never lose their humanity and this makes his work essentially humane and uplifting. He never lapses into clichés or emotional and verbal bombast, instead his characters tread the boundary between hope and despair. This is what makes his work relatable and relevant.

Dattani's work is in English and therefore many lay the charge that his work is 'elitist' simply because it is in a language that is not strictly seen as native by many. He argues that "let us not forget that there are 80 million English-speaking Indians and that certainly is not a small number. If at all we have to define the region of Indian English, I would use the term 'urban' and not 'elitist.' Elitism has existed in the country for thousands of years. His language is the English of everyday speech with its wordplay, Indianisations and quirks. Therefore he believes that one cannot really translate the plays, one can only transcreate them. It is impossible to translate the original idiom of the play. In fact he believes that the translated artefact is a new creation and isn't simply the original in another language. His view is that in India playwrights are "not willing to take the leap into art. We don't consider language an artifice through which the playwright expresses himself. We consider language to belong to the character alone." This has consequences on the way the audience expects various characters to react and determines their reactions when they stray or confirm to these expectations. The use of Indian English makes this interaction even more fascinating. This is the language spoken by the people of the country and can be both an indicator of their social class and aspirational at the same time. The more broken the English that is spoken, the more apparent is it that the character is aspiring for a better life. Another salient feature of his plays is that this English makes the audience realise the way it too negotiates with the multilingualism and bilingualism it resides in the everyday life. In

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fact, if one listens carefully one can hear the translation from the native language to the spoken English in the dialogue.

Dattani considers a play to be primarily an oral artefact. In an interview he gave to *fountain* in 2013, he said “I think a play, once it’s sort of read out, that’s when you get the feel of how it sounds, and how it moves, spatially and temporally. Because it is a temporal arc. It’s like writing music. Unless it’s played out, you won’t really get an idea of how it moves. That’s the way I feel about it. The ideal situation would be that I get to have the actors come in and read things out my initial draft, and then I can go on with it.” He insists that plays are primarily an oral art form: the act of reading and enacting a play make it come alive and make it fundamentally different from the written artefact. Dattani insists that while the director/writer may have some perceptions about the play and the characters that people it, it is fundamentally the actors that bring them alive. He believes that it is essentially an actor’s medium. He says that “once you’ve had enough experience in theatre, you would know how it is going to play out as a performance, once the actors bring in their own interpretations and the director brings in her own interpretations - it will have a life of its own, which as a writer, you can’t really control. And you must control that.”

Another salient feature of his plays is the visual appeal of the stage. The sets are complicated and very appealing. Often the sets stand for different times and work on various spatial and temporal levels. As a result, Dattani gives copious notes and stage directions in his plays. Dattani has also had his plays aired on radio. Here the only way to distinguish between dialogues and internal monologues is to have actors speak softly and stand very close to the mic as they speak so that all the subtle nuances of emotions can be communicated. Dattani’s characters belong to groups that have often been stereotyped and spoofed in the mainstream imagination. Therefore he is careful that the actors play these characters with sensitivity and don’t succumb to the stereotypes. He also allows the various directors to present the play as they deem fit, thus characters are reformed and newer interpretations of the play are formed. He does not take exception to this since he believes that “most of it draws from within the play, and interpretations are very strong.” However he insists that when this happens fidelity to the script is kept and no words or situations are changed. Even though he gives copious stage directions he agrees that sometimes a director can overlook them if he understands the play. However he insists that they are a part of the stage craft of storytelling on the stage. If a director doesn’t understand this and overlooks the directions then the production can go haywire.

When it comes to the craft of writing, Dattani believes that the playwright should not write with an agenda. Instead he should be truthful to the character and the story. However, it is impossible to divorce the socio-political environment in which we and by extension the characters live. Therefore, the playwright has to be conscious of the degree to which he is drawing the socio-political environment.

He thinks that “drama works best when those two are woven into your characters.” He believes that drama should have catharsis, it is necessary to acknowledge one’s emotions and deal with them so that we can move forward. In other words, he says that there is a “need to do something similar, in that unless we have some kind of a dialogue, a kind of mirroring, we are not going to be able to introspect and reflect on our environment the way we have to.”

According to Dattani, comedy is an integral part of drama since it provides both relief and is satirical. It is this humour that makes the audience laugh at itself that allows us to create a psychological distance from yourselves and look at issues and individuals dispassionately.

Dattani also mentors new playwrights in the workshops he organises. According to him, writing for the stage requires an understanding not just of the textual element of the play but also an understanding of the staging would actually occur and the impact of the same on the theme of the play. For him state support of the part form is essential so that more themes and issues can be discussed and resented before the audience. He considers theatre groups to be laboratories where this occurs. He says that “theatre is a community activity. With greater support, it is possible for theatre groups to do outreach work in developing new talent, and also employing theatres for teaching communication skills, interpersonal development, and a healthier attitude towards multiple perspectives in society as diverse as ours.”

Dattani stresses that in the current scenario it is important that playwrights desist from using their art as a tool for state propaganda but instead take a stand with respect to contemporary social and political issues.

A work of art has its own socio-political energy to do with societal concerns, not the propagation of government manifestos. The agenda of art is to offer human experiences that raise our empathy levels, the agenda of political campaigning is to garner support, sometimes by lowering our empathic values.

Writing about Dattani, Aditi De notes that

His words tear at the edge of consciousness, blurring social constructs. He draws naked truths out of long-shuttered closets, ferreting out themes beyond bedroom farces and historical romances. His dialogues have their roots in middle class urban India, interspersed with Hindi and Gujarati, charged with unspoken socio-cultural contexts.

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Check Your Progress

1. Which major work inspired Dattani to try his hand at writing?
2. What do Dattani’s plays deal with?
3. How are the sets in Dattani’s plays?

10.3 SEVEN STEPS AROUND FIRE: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Dattani deals with taboo themes in his work *Seven Steps around the Fire* that was staged in 1997. Like his other plays, *Seven Steps* also deals with urban middle-class people whose basic needs are taken care of. It focuses on individuals who try to achieve their ambitions but find that they are hindered by concerns of family, or are hindered by ideas about personal freedom, corruption and social and cultural prejudices. The play explores the way the upper classes in society exploit those on the margins of society simply for the sake of maintaining their social power and privileged positions. It also explores how these sections then perpetuate their superiority by further manipulating them. It is ironic that even as they use those on the margins for their own greed for power they remain blind to the damage they cause to the former sections of society. The play presents the have-nots of society as puppets who have no agency and are subject to the whims and fancies of those in power. The play centres on mystery and the difficulty of knowing things in their entirety. The focus of the play is the murder of Kamala, a eunuch. In the course of attempting to 'solve' the crime, the play explores not only the relationships between different characters from this community but also their relationship with those who constitute the 'elite' of society. In the play, Dattani picks up on the fascination and the horror with which the urban middle classes and the elites view eunuchs. While they are an integral part of all important occasions in the lives of urban residents, paradoxically they are invisible the rest of the time. There is a conspiracy of silence wherein the urban residents refuse to acknowledge their existence. The tragedy that this causes isn't surprising: the erasure of their identity implies that they have no recourse to resources. Since they are seen as oddities and as obscene they are removed from the public landscape. This in turn leaves them open for sexual and emotional exploitation and manipulation. Dattani forces the audience to answer an uncomfortable question: if society is embarrassed by their presence, then is it not responsible for their dehumanisation and objectification. The presence of eunuchs and their celebration is considered auspicious for the newly married couple. In fact their presence ensures fertility for the couple. The fact that the eunuchs themselves cannot reproduce and the trauma that the inability to bear children might cause them is easily overlooked. The position of eunuchs and other Trans individuals in a society that values heteronormativity is the focal point of the play.

The play opens with Uma, a Phd scholar who is conducting research about eunuchs, asking questions about the murder of Kamala, a beautiful eunuch. The beauty in itself is problematic since it further muddies the water with respect to Kamala's gender identity. She is beautiful like a woman while not really being a woman. Thus uncomfortable questions of sexual behaviour and prostitution are also raised. Munswamy, a constable is assigned by her husband Suresh Rao, to ensure that she doesn't come to any harm. Suresh is the Superintendent of Police.

It is ironic the even as Uma goes about trying to ‘investigate’ the murder she does not question the protection that her husband’s position in the police force grants her. The playwright wants to appraise the audience about its own privileges wherein it can talk and analyse the condition of marginalised communities, and even sympathise with them, without ever really understanding what it means to be in the same position. He seems to be asking the question as to the use of this empathy. In order to follow up on Kamala’s murder, Uma enters the grey zones in the city: areas where these non-women reside. The presence of these grey zones which are a kind of no man’s land in the middle of prosperity and plenty is jarring for Dattani.

Uma interviews Anarkali, another eunuch, in order to understand what happened to Kamala. She insists on referring to Anarkali in the feminine gender. The playwright notes that Munswamy finds this amusing since the latter consistently refers to herself in the neutral gender ‘it.’ This is very amusing since it reveals the facile nature of Uma’s humanism: she is willing to assist Anarkali and find the ‘truth’ as long as it adheres to her world view. For all her claims of belonging to the educated elite she too is a prisoner of her own prejudices; the eunuchs of the world are useful for her as long as they assist her in her own research. Dattani forces the audience to ask the question about the real depth and sincerity of Uma’s engagement with them. Are they another kind of specimens for her; while mainstream society has use of them only on the occasion of marriage and birth, Uma’s exploitation is more insidious. It is disguised as concern and care. As Uma goes about questioning Anarkali, Munswamy asks her to look at and investigate other acceptable cases. In other words, some victims are better than others. This hidden hierarchy in society makes the situation uncomfortable. Uma insists on continuing her questions without paying any attention to Anarkali’s state of mind or even willingness to engage the process.

At this point, the plot highlights a tragic reality of the Trans people in the country; they have been so summarily rejected by the mainstream that they live in a world of myths and folklore to deal with the isolation that their non-normative sexual identities have imposed on them. Paradoxically while this isolation may have been imposed by others, they have no other option but to embrace it since it allows them to exist in some degree of safety. The playwright forces the audience to question its liberal antecedents and pretensions of openness. Anarkali is so starved of human contact that she readily embraces Uma and tries to build a relationship with her along familial lines and call each other “we are mother and daughter.” This connects the two on the lines of gender, even though one isn’t strictly a ‘woman.’ At the same time, it draws a relationship of victimhood between the two characters, even as Uma remains oblivious to the same. The survival of both is subject to the fancies of the patriarchal society: even a constable feels comfortable telling Uma what she should or should not study. It is illuminating that it is Anarkali, a marginal character who recognises this similarity. Uma, insulated by her privileges, is blind to this reality.

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The play poignantly highlights the alacrity with which society abandons those it deems deviant. Anarkali has no family and wishes to build one in the people she meets. The fact that even though Munswamy is carelessly indulgent of her, he refuses to accept this relationship of 'brother,' reveals that this attempt is doomed to failure. She understands and anticipates this reaction. However she does not know how to react when Uma accepts the relationship of sisterhood between the two. She oscillates between surprise and fear at transgressing the acceptable bounds of interaction between them. As a result, she slips into the abuses and venomous statements that are her stock in trade. This suspicion of any overtures of friendship is indicative of the fact that upper class society consistently views Trans people and eunuchs as types and not as individuals in their own right. Repeated interactions have taught the marginal communities not to trust overtures of friendship since they are always initiated with a hidden agenda. The fact that Uma's interactions are not out of a desire to help but to further her academic career bears this out. However, it is not possible to understand the relationship simply on these lines. Uma does care about Anarkali, they really are sisters since both have been abandoned by the men in their lives. Just as Anarkali is produced before the male gaze on the happy occasions of marriage and births, and for illicit sex; similarly her husband needs Uma only to fulfil his sexual urges. In this manner, the playwright lays bare the isolation which traps us and is the essential condition of urban life. Even while individuals live lives of privilege they grasp at any attempts to connect with others, no matter how fleeting the connection.

When she realises that Uma needs something from her, Anarkali exploits the situation to get what she can: her freedom, money and cigarettes. While writing about the play Jeremy Mortimer writes that "Mahesh's plays often feature characters who are questioning their identity, and who feel isolated in her marriage, and this sense of isolation makes her empathise with Anarkali, the Hijra she befriends." Her investigation takes Uma to Champa in Shivaji Nagar. She gives Champa money for Anarkali's bail. She suspects that it was the rivalry between Anarkali and Kamala that led to the latter's murder. Champa is concerned only with bailing Anarkali out, her involvement in the crime does not concern her. However, Uma is still riddled with doubt since she does not "want to help anyone who is a murderer." At this point of time in the play, it becomes clear that morality and issues of guilt and innocence are privileges that only the elites can afford. For people on the margins of society, mere survival is an issue and takes precedence. They seem to realise instinctively, which is later borne out of experience, that notions of innocence and guilt are imposed on them by institutions and people more powerful than them.

At this point of time, Salim enters the plot, and he is in search of a photograph. Anarkali reveals that Subbu had fallen in love with Kamala and had married her. There was even a marriage photograph. However during the celebrations some men had crashed the wedding and had, it seems kidnapped or at least violated Kamala. This led to her death/murder. Anarkali reveals that she tried to prevent

the marriage since she knew that it would only result in tragedy. Later on, it is revealed that Subbu had married Kamala, and that this had enraged his father Mr Sharma who was the Chief Minister. He sent his henchman, Salim to find, kill and burn Kamala.

While Anarkali gets bail, Mr Sharma organises his son Subbu's wedding. It is at this time that Mr Sharma is inconvenienced: the hijras have to come and dance in the wedding since tradition demands it. At the same time, these very hijras could reveal the truth and turn the joyous occasion into a tragedy. When Subbu sees Anarkali dancing before him he is reminded of the dead Kamala. In a fit of despair he commits suicide using Suresh's gun. The play concludes with the final revelations. While the audience gets to 'know' everything, nonetheless a pertinent question remains: what did the revelations achieve and was justice dispensed. The play began with the acknowledgement of the invisibility of the community. However, in the course of the play, the hope that they would be granted recognition is raised only to be belied at the end.

*Maresh Dattani:
Seven Steps Around Fire*

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Check Your Progress

4. What does *Seven Steps* focus on?
5. How does the play present the have-nots of society?
6. Which tragic reality of the Trans people does the plot of the play highlight?

10.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was a major influence early on and inspired him to try his hand at writing.
2. Dattani's plays deal with contemporary issues and tragedies like communal tension, homosexual love and marriage, child abuse, and the problems of patriarchy.
3. The sets of Dattani's plays are complicated and very appealing. Often the sets stand for different times and work on various spatial and temporal levels.
4. It focuses on individuals who try to achieve their ambitions but find that they are hindered by concerns of family, or are hindered by ideas about personal freedom, corruption and social and cultural prejudices.
5. The play presents the have-nots of society as puppets who have no agency and are subject to the whims and fancies of those in power.
6. The plot highlights a tragic reality of the trans people in the country; they have been so summarily rejected by the mainstream that they live in a world of myths and folklore to deal with the isolation that their non-normative sexual identities have imposed on them.

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10.5 SUMMARY

- Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was a major influence early on and inspired Mahesh Dattani to try his hand at writing. Madhu Rye's *Kumarni Agashi* further inspired him to try playwriting.
- Dattani is the first English playwright to win the Sahitya Academy award for *Final solutions and other plays*. *Final Solutions*, *Tara* and *30 Days in September* were also selected for the Sahitya Kala Parishad over the years.
- Dattani insists that while the director/writer may have some perceptions about the play and the characters that people it, it is fundamentally the actors that bring them alive. He believes that it is essentially an actor's medium.
- Dattani's characters belong to groups that have often been stereotyped and spoofed in the mainstream imagination. Therefore he is careful that the actors play these characters with sensitivity and don't succumb to the stereotypes.
- He believes that drama should have catharsis, it is necessary to acknowledge one's emotions and deal with them so that we can move forward.
- Dattani stresses that in the current scenario it is important that playwrights desist from using their art as a tool for state propaganda but instead take a stand with respect to contemporary social and political issues.
- Like his other plays, *Seven Steps* also deals with urban middle-class people whose basic needs are taken care of. It focuses on individuals who try to achieve their ambitions but find that they are hindered by concerns of family, or are hindered by ideas about personal freedom, corruption and social and cultural prejudices.
- The fact that the eunuchs themselves cannot reproduce and the trauma that the inability to bear children might cause them is easily overlooked. The position of eunuchs and other Trans individuals in a society that values heteronormativity is the focal point of the play.
- For all her claims of belonging to the educated elite, Uma too is a prisoner of her own prejudices; the eunuchs of the world are useful for her as long as they assist her in her own research.
- For people on the margins of society, mere survival is an issue and takes precedence. They seem to realise instinctively, which is later borne out of experience, that notions of innocence and guilt are imposed on them by institutions and people more powerful than them.

10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Bombast:** It refers to the use of a high-sounding language with little meaning, used to impress people.

- **Transcreation:** It is a concept used in the field of translation studies to describe the process of adapting a message from one language to another, while maintaining its intent, style, tone, and context.
- **Ferret:** It refers to the act of rummaging about in a place or container in search of something.
- **Objectification:** It is the action of degrading someone to the status of a mere object.
- **Heteronormativity:** It is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation.

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10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the nature of the characters in Dattani's plays.
2. Why is comedy an integral part of drama as per Dattani?
3. What does the play explore with regard to the upper classes?
4. Write a short note on the depth and sincerity of Uma's engagement with the eunuchs.
5. What has Mortimer remarked about Dattani's plays?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the arguments in favour of Dattani's use of English as the medium of writing.
2. Summarise the plot of the play *Seven Steps Around Fire*.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Hoskote, Ranjit. 2002. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books India.
- King, Bruce Alvin. 1987. *Modern Indian Poetry in English: Revised Edition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
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UNIT 11 VIJAY TENDULKAR: *SILENCE THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 About the Author
- 11.3 Silence the Court is in Session: Critical Analysis
- 11.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.8 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session*. The play was first published in 1967. The play was Tendulkar's first to become part of the New Indian Drama phenomenon of the 1960s, and the first important modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as the central character and the victim. The protagonist of the play is a woman named Leela Benare, who has a natural lust for life and ignores social norms and traditions. Being different from the others she is easily isolated and made the victim of a cruel game cunningly planned by her co-actors.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and work of Vijay Tendulkar
- Analyse the various aspects and background of the play
- Discern the underlying themes explored in the play

11.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vijay Tendulkar was a path-breaking theatre writer with international acclaim. In Indian theatre, he stands along with other prominent writers such as Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh who have taken Indian drama to a higher level. He has been a forerunner of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for the past forty years. A

creative writer with a fine sensibility, he has beautifully used the medium of theatre to reveal the alienation of the newly Independent Indian individual to contemporary politics. His plays explore the various relationships in society- men's dominance over women, the class divide in the society, the individual (particularly females) expressing freedom in their thoughts, words and deed with those of the society. One of the main themes in his plays is the depiction of women's vulnerability in the Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern has been the relationship between individual and society. In play after play, he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born in Kolhapur in the state of Maharashtra on January 6, 1928. He died in 2008 leaving an everlasting impression on theatre, be it Marathi or Indian traditional theatre. He was born in a Saraswat Brahmin family and received a rich literary exposure in his childhood owing to the publication business of his father. He is said to have composed his first story at the age of six. Tendulkar witnessed social development in India from pre independent India to the turbulence experienced by nascent independent India and post-independence India. All such experiences had a huge impact on the creative mind of Tendulkar, and being a well-read person he had a lot to say and write about at a very young age itself. He displayed this creativity and literary sensibility at a very young age of eleven when he composed his first play. The Quit India Movement created an urge within the young, perceptive mind of Tendulkar and he went against his family members' wishes to join the movement. Tendulkar had a keen literary sense and was sensible enough to deeply perceive the social order around him and could see the hypocrisy being practiced in the society. His first job was that of a journalist in Pune. He worked as a journalist for several years before becoming the Chief Sub editor of a Marathi Daily. Soon after he quit his job and worked as a freelance writer and served as a regular columnist for *The Maharashtra Times*. He became editor of Navbharat in 1948. His creativity found another outlet in short stories. His stories and narratives usually contained dialogues in detail, so he felt encouraged and initiated writing one act plays as well. The exercise proved fulfilling and satisfying to the creative writer and he subsequently wrote full-fledged plays. Tendulkar also provided guidance to students studying 'playwright writing' in US universities. His creative writing covers a vast span of five decades during which he has written 27 full-length plays and 25 one-act plays. Tendulkar died battling the effects of myasthenia gravis in Pune on May 19, 2008. He received several awards for his work, some of them are listed below:

Tendulkar's initial attempts as a playwright were not successful, however, he did not get discouraged and continued his efforts. In 1956, he wrote *Shrimant*, which established him as a playwright of substance. He emerged as a playwright, ready to explore unconventional themes and social changes occurring around him with a critical perspective.

*Vijay Tendulkar: Silence
the Court is in Session*

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Shrimant explored a rather radical storyline- an unmarried young woman decides to keep her unborn child. Her rich father, on the other hand tries to ‘buy’ his social prestige by getting someone to marry her. In *Shrimant* and other plays as well Tendulkar challenges the social moral values and taboos being practiced by the middle class in society. The idea was to provoke the audience to become more realistic and bring about a social change. This questioning and criticism remains in his later work as well. Many of the famous classic plays of Marathi theatre and modern Indian Theatre were penned down by Tendulkar. His success is registered by the fact that they have been translated and performed in many Indian languages and are still being popularly staged in India as well as abroad. *Ghashiram Kotwal (Ghashiram the Constable)* (1972), is one of the longest running plays in the world. It is a musical combining Marathi folk performance styles with the contemporary theatrical techniques. The play has received over six thousand performances in India and abroad, in the original as well as in translation.

Shantata is one of his another masterpiece and is a play in Three Acts. Similar to *Shrimant*, the protagonist of this play also is an unconventional woman. The play depicts how a woman’s unconventional conduct draws criticism for her. The other members of the society accuse her for threatening the very edifice of the society, by making her unconventional choice. The play makes a realistic depiction of the plight of such a woman in society. People are not concerned about their conduct, but they seek sadistic pleasure in hunting her down for her decisions and subsequent actions.

The play *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (1967) is a famous play in Marathi, translated into English as *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Priya Adarkar in 1978. The play is originally based on Friedrich Durrenmatt’s story *Die Panne*’ (Traps). The initial production was not received well by the audience owing to its scathing portrayal of the hypocrisy practiced in society. However, in 1970, when it was honoured the prestigious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award for the best play of the year, the play and the playwright became a hit all over the country. This play marked the entry of Tendulkar in the league of great writers of the time and he became a familiar name in the literary circle. It was first staged in 1967 and is acknowledged to be one of his mature works.

Check Your Progress

1. List some of the issues discussed in Vijay Tendulkar’s plays.
2. What is the storyline of the play *Shrimant*?

11.3 SILENCE THE COURT IS IN SESSION: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This play is located in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, believes, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times. The plot of the play is

inspired from a short story, written in German by a Swiss writer which was translated in English. The play depicts newly independent Indian society, experiencing changes owing to modernization and challenges of democracy. It was also a period of social change, when the people were willing to give way to new ways of living, assessing the validity of age old practices, social customs and believes. The style used by Tendulkar in this play is also an attempt to try something unconventional, testing the contemporary against the old practices and vice versa. In this play *Silence! The Court Is In Session*, Tendulkar introduces nursery rhymes and poems, through its characters. This is a traditional theatrical technique used in Indian drama, wherein the characters freely engage in poetic dialogues. Thus, emotions find free expressions and the portrayal is more comprehensive and realistic. According to the author and critic Shailja Wadikar, 'Tendulkar is a silent social activist who covertly wishes to bring about a change in people's mode of thinking, feeling and behaving'.

The protagonist of the play is an unconventional woman. Her experience places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes. The young woman and the choices she makes are seen as threatening the very edifice of the society she lives in. Her existence therefore becomes problematic and she is perforce silenced in the course of the play. The Play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a play in three acts dealing with the lives of ordinary people in a small town. Coming from diverse backgrounds, around ten characters are shown to be engaged in a group activity. They are the members of 'The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association (SMTPA)'. It is a socially committed group whose main objective is to sensitize the public towards social evils and facilitate them to work for a social cause.

For this particular evening, the group is supposed to be meeting for performing a mock trial protesting against President Johnson's production of atomic weapons. This idea of mock trial, used by Tendulkar is a wonderful strategy. The 'court' is visualized by people as the only place where the righteous conduct happens and where truth will prevail and it is believed that the guilty will definitely be punished. It is seen as the sacred place in society where the problems are resolved in order to establish a just and peaceful society.

The people working for the court, lawyers and judges are accorded the highest respect and are kept in very high esteem in the society. They are expected to be fair, just and committed in their dealings. However, the play shows that even this institution is affected with hypocrisy. There is no responsible behaviour evidenced by the audience from the court officials (judge and lawyer). They are shown to be highly manipulative, prejudiced, biased and unjust. Tendulkar employs an open discussion forum, possible in a court for depicting the social conflict. The mock trial portrays a group of people, holding respectable positions in the society, playing the dangerous game of targeting a lone woman, who is the victim of their activity. She is not even aware initially that she is being hunted by the so called fellow mates. It takes the group members a few minutes to alienate her from their group

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and assault her personal life. The first act of the play takes place in an empty hall. It is usually used for hosting public functions in the village such as speeches, receptions, weddings, women's bhajans and magic shows. The audience is introduced to all the characters in the play in the first act itself as all the members of the SMPTA arrive for rehearsals. The amateur theatre group works with the objective of spreading awareness and working for a social cause.

Characters

Let us discuss some of the different characters in the play. These are:

- **Raghu Samant:** He is portrayed as a gentle person with mild manners and friendly temperament. He is shown as appearing on the stage, holding a green cloth parrot. He is said to be a person who earns 'enough to keep body and soul together'. He tells the audience that he is unmarried and stays with his brother and sister in-law and is very fond of his nephew. He is shown to assist the group in running their small errands. Later on in the play he acts as the fourth witness as well.
- **Leela Benare:** She is an experienced school teacher and comes across as an intelligent, straightforward spirited woman having a mind of her own. She has a good sense of humour and gets amused at the behaviour of fellow group members. She is not afraid in voicing her opinion. She comes out as a strong woman with independent thinking.
- **Sukhatme:** Arrives on stage smoking a beedi and is introduced as a lawyer along with the rest of the characters.
- **Servant:** He is apparently one of the general factotum which arrives on stage. He is probably a hired porter by the group members. He is shown to carry 'two wooden enclosures, the dock and the witness box' which he puts down on the left side of the wings, and returns to face Ponkshe, who paid him money for his services. Next moment he leaves the stage.
- **Balu Rokde:** He comes along with the Kashikars and follows their orders. It is told that he is indebted to the family for he was given shelter by the Kashikars, at a very young age. They fed, clothed and educated him.
- **Ponkshe:** The Science student in the play who failed his intermediate examinations, as per Leela Benare. He shares that clearing these examinations would have made him eligible for the university education. Ponkshe works as a clerk at the Central Telegraph office, smokes a pipe and has appeared second time for his inter exam.
- **Mrs. Kashikar:** Mrs Kashikar, is given the epithet of 'the hand that rocks the cradle'. She has no children of her own and nurtures and provides secondary support as a housewife. She is referred to as Mrs Kashikar – her maiden name is not mentioned throughout the play. It appears this is her only public identity. She works like a shadow to her husband, who calls all the shots and is depicted as being rude and indifferent to her. The notion of

females being known by the surname of her husband after marriage is being questioned, as it is no less than a gradual diminishing of a female identity and personality. Mrs Kashikar appears to be unmindful of her husband's dominating personality. She has accepted it as a way of life.

- **Mr. Kashikar:** The personality of Mr Kashikar is penned as a very rude, dominating person, who wants to have his way on all occasions. Being the dominant spouse, as expected in a traditional Indian family, he indulges his wife by stopping on the way to the hall and buys her flowers to put in her hair. Benare refers to him as the chairman of the amateur theatre group. He is a self-assured person with a very high self-esteem and self-importance.
- **Local Resident Karnik:** He is addicted to pan chewing and is said to be an experimental theatre actor.

Keeping the traditional Sanskrit drama style, this play also has major and minor characters. The setting is one single evening. There are young men, a single young woman and a married matured woman in this play. However, the theme of the play is not love and commitment. Instead, we find a cross section of people from the middle class assembling together for staging a mock trial on certain social issues. The characters are not related to each other on the personal front. It is their common interest in acting and desire to work for social cause that brings them together in one place at one time. The Kashikars are an exception as they are husband and wife and Balu Rokde has been brought up by them. Rest of the characters are different from each other, in terms of their age, gender, experience, personality and social status. This is a new and crucial aspect of Tendulkar's play as it deals with issues of collective psychology and how it shapes individuals. The play draws upon an older tradition of Indian drama. It documents the lives, values and culture of people in India of 1950. It exposes the hypocrisy of the middle class of that period.

Act I of the Play

The play takes place in an old community hall, used by the residents of the village for social gathering and performing various activities such as bhajans, wedding etc. The stage directions tell us that Samant enters carrying a lock and a key and a green cloth parrot. Miss Benare, follows him, carrying a purse and a basket of equipment. The objects they bring with them are stage props. Besides there are broken chairs and several other artefacts on the stage such as 'worn out portraits of national leaders.'

Act II of the Play

This Act begins on a different note. While Act I allowed Benare to modulate our responses to all the other characters, we observe a major shift in Act II. Earlier in Act I, we learnt about the rest of the characters through Benare. Act II reveals to us new aspects of Benare's life, provided gratuitously by the rest of the characters assembled on the stage. She is now on trial in more ways than one. Benare is

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shaken and startled by the accusation that is levelled against her. She tries to regain her composure at the beginning of Act II.

After a few false starts, slapstick and comic in nature, Benare who is charged with the crime of infanticide denies it. This is followed by the argument of the prosecution, represented by Sukhatame. Sukhatame pontificates on the significance of motherhood and highlights the glorification and deification of the role of the mother in Indian culture. Kashikar adds to this, quoting from Sanskrit and reiterates the high status of the mother and the motherland, both of which supersede even that of heaven. Such exalted constructions of women as mothers are part of the history of the nationalist movements and of the period preceding it wherein women's identities were fixed within the domestic procreative space and subsequently mythologized around notions of the motherland. How do such constructions translate when examined in the context of real women? Do we, for instance, see any evidence of the exalted role played by any mother within the world of the play? Is there any lived record of the vestiges of this older ideology? If we look at how Mrs. Kashikar is treated, we see very little evidence of any status accorded to her. It is true that Mrs. Kashikar has no children of her own. Therefore, one conclusion that we could possibly draw is that in this group of people women without children are not held in high esteem. Does this change when we encounter women with children? The play itself does not deal directly with any actual mother figure. Samant's sister in law is the only point of indirect reference that we get. So in a mock trial where the judge and the prosecution award the highest status to the figure of the mother, we need to see how the court will treat an expectant mother. Benare's observation that all the pontification offered by Sukhatme and Kashikar on the subject of motherhood sounds like it is out of textbooks is significant. After declaring that the status of a mother is hallowed, the court proceeds to cross examine Benare. What exactly is the nature of this cross examination?

At first, the meaning of the term infanticide needs to be explained to Samant. On understanding its implication Samant informs everyone present that a widow had been tried in their village 'one or two years ago' for the same crime. This little anecdote provided by Samant goes back a long way into the history of women's lives in patriarchal Maharashtra. Before we move into any further analysis of Act II of the play, it is important to examine some very significant historical details that will sharpen our understanding of the issues raised in the play.

In the year 1882, Tarabai Shinde, a woman activist from Buldhana wrote a tract entitled *Stri Purusha Tulna* in Marathi. Her 52 page tract was a response to the death sentence of one Vijayalakshmi in the Bombay High Court, a twenty four year old widow, who had been found guilty of infanticide. While Vijayalakshmi's sentence was mitigated from death by hanging to one of transportation, sensational publicity accompanied the event. The attention she received and the public discussions and debates that accompanied her case pushed Tarabai Shinde to draw attention to harsh and prescriptive patriarchal attitudes to women in her time. Tarabai rightly points out that women are singled out for blame. *Stree Purush*

Tulna analysed the attitudes to women in a patriarchal society. In Vijayalakshmi's case, the offending male is never mentioned. He is never discussed or named along with her although common sense would allow us to deduce that ordinarily a man would be responsible for impregnating a woman. As denizens of the twenty first century, we could perhaps consider ourselves far away in actual time from the issue that Tarabai Shinde raises.

Let us however look at the points of similarity and difference in both stories. Benare, as Act II lets us deduce, is a young unmarried woman who is pregnant. Vijayalakshmi too was a young woman who was obliged to follow the cruel and heartless systems of denial and self-abnegation prescribed in orthodox Hindu communities for widows. Although they belong to two different centuries, the reactions to their transgression share much in common. Again, what both women have in common is the fact that in conventional and traditional societies both unmarried and widowed women are disallowed any sexual proclivity. They are also not allowed to bear children. What both Benare and Vijayalakshmi have in common is that their identities of unmarried woman/widow do not allow them any access to the males in their community. Vijayalakshmi's life as a widow only allowed her a constricted life within the domestic sphere. As a young woman in independent India Benare has access to the public sphere. However, the fact of their pregnancies leaves everyone in the community agog. Vijayalakshmi has the local policeman patrol her, while in Benare's case all the members of her troupe and onlookers view her with suspicion. Their pregnant condition is the starting point for the generation of tremendous social outrage. In the eyes of the legal system Vijayalakshmi is charged with a criminal offence and punished for it. Benare is also charged with infanticide. So although Tendulkar's play is set in modern India, it draws upon practices and prejudices that are drawn from a hoary past. Tarabai's tract is very pertinent to our understanding of Tendulkar's play despite having been written almost seventy years before the play. Look now at the responses to the news of Benare's pregnancy that each of the characters in *Shantata* offers.

As we hear the responses of each character in Act II who has some evidence to offer against Benare, we are very disturbed by the viciousness and malice that is directed at her. Some of this information, we must remember, is actually fictitious detail which is concocted impromptu by the characters in order to have a case for the prosecution. In the first instance, Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide. Nothing is offered by way of concrete evidence to support this claim. Instead, the entire court scene degenerates into a series of discussions pertaining to Benare's personal life and mores. Why is there this sudden shift? Why does the play move from the question of infanticide to an exploration of personal relationships in Benare's case? As a matter of fact, the earliest speculations are offered by Samant, who, as the audience and the characters are aware, is making up a story as he goes along. Does this give us any new insights into the personality of Samant? Is this really the man who came across as timid and simple at the beginning of the play? Does he seem rather conservative, perhaps even unused to the idea of accepting women in

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the public sphere? Is he representative of a hidebound patriarchal system of belief that readily damns all women who do not conform to prescriptive patterns of behaviour?

Samant's reference to the widow who was accused of the crime of infanticide links the current narrative to an older past evoking a host of associations. It also asks us to look at the issue of infanticide as a problem that continues to plague us in contemporary times despite being punishable as a heinous crime. Where does the impetus for infanticide originate? Does the act stem from cruel heartless women, who kill their young or from an inflexible societal code that prescribes rules for women and then ruthlessly polices them? Samant we must remember is a voracious reader of racy bestsellers written in the hundreds. It is possible to argue that the imagined narrative that Samant provides so effortlessly to implicate Benare is deeply rooted in a world view that borders on misogyny. This would explain why every character in the play adds details to sully Benare's reputation and present her as a forward and immoral young woman who makes a play for every man she sees. A great deal of vicarious pleasure and smugness is displayed by all the characters who offer gossipy details of their exchanges with Benare.

While ostensibly Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide, what the second act does is to make insinuations about her. Kashikar, who plays the judge suggests mildly that Benare's real life cannot be discussed in the mock trial but Sukhatme as counsel overrules him. Kashikar himself is shown as enjoying the stories being concocted by the witnesses, despite his faint demurrals.

This is really the private secret that is slowly unveiling itself in Act II and will finally be made public in Act III, namely how men view women and how the very mention of women conjures up certain stereotypical roles and identities for women. There are violent undercurrents that run through Act II and reach a crescendo in Act III. Ram Sharma has drawn attention to the fact that the undercurrent of violence that the audience is made to encounter draws its inspiration from Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty'. As he points out:

Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar, relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in as much as it is in nature in human nature. He says, "Unlike the communists I don't think violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that human being is born with. Not that it is bad. Without violence man might have turned into a vegetable." While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable.

The introduction of violence on the stage is certainly an influence that Tendulkar incorporates from his readings of world theatre. However, this is not to suggest that violence is non-existent in Indian society, ancient or modern. In fact, it

may be argued that violence is endemic in societies like ours where coercive hierarchies of caste and gender are operative features. So Tendulkar is depicting quite accurately the perspectives that govern the way we live our lives on the stage.

To move now to the moot point of the play, in Act II, all manner of insinuations are now levelled against Benare. Each of the male characters who speaks of Benare does so in a disparaging manner and Kashikar allows this, insisting that this is only a mock trial. Benare at first tries to deal with the cross examination light-heartedly and displays a sense of flippant humour in the initial stages. However, as the act proceeds, she becomes tense and agitated. As the questions become more intimidating and shrill, Benare protests that her private life cannot be discussed in a mock trial. Benare's bursting into tears and leaving the scene of the mock trial is intended to arouse the suspicions of the rest of the characters and also perhaps the audience. In her absence Kashikar remarks that 'The whole fabric of society is being soiled these days.' Sukhatme's comments, 'we must all get together. We must act,' recalls for us the end of Act I, where a decision to stage a mock trial and make Benare the prime accused was set into motion. Then as now, Benare's absence from the stage is significant. Benare returns to pick up her bag and purse and tries to leave the room through the only doorway to the outside. Unfortunately for her, the door is stuck and she is not able to open it. The locked door becomes symbolic of the absence of escape routes for Benare. Despite not wanting to continue with the play, she is forced to continue with it. Act II ends on a note of unease. Kashikar, the judge and Sukhatme, the prosecutor, who press for the continuance of the mock trial, are shown as actively interested in the procedure. Act I suggested undercurrents of tension, beneath the façade of bonhomie. In Act II, all attempts at maintaining a sense of camaraderie are split wide open. What begins in jest as a mock trial swiftly assumes ugly dimensions.

Act III of the Play

Act I and Act II are more or less of the same duration. Act III is a tad longer than the two earlier Acts. In an actual presentation, this may perhaps escape the notice of the audience. Act III is also the most intense and most serious of all the three acts.

When Act III opens, the cast has not even changed their position. Benare stands still. At the end of Act II she had tried desperately to leave the hall. Now she refuses to respond to the directive of entering the witness box. Mrs. Kashikar drags Benare into the witness box. At the beginning of Act II, Benare had agreed in good faith to play the role of the accused, although the idea had been mooted in her absence. If at that time we had a suspicion of the mal intent of the other characters, the sequence in Act II has succeeded in convincing us that there is definitely some malice and mischief afoot. In Act III Benare does not agree to occupy the witness box. She is placed there by force. The cross examination now is insistent and relentless. She does not answer any of the questions that are directed

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at her. If this was just a friendly exchange, or if any of the other characters were really her friends, they should have stopped the cross examination and asked her why she was so upset. This was not done in Act II. It is not going to be done in Act III either. Instead the characters harp on how this is only a mock trial. Increasingly the audience is forced to recognize that Benare's cross examination crosses the boundaries of reasonable argument and propriety. We cannot help noticing the insensitivity of the rest of the cast. Benare's silence is quickly translated as contempt of court. Her sense of outrage is quickly interpreted as defiance and provides an opportunity for most of the characters to testify against her. Other than Samant, who is really not in the game, as he is not part of the living courtroom team, no one is willing to speak favourably on her behalf. Instead of rallying around her, the rest of the characters begin answering on her behalf. All the veiled insinuations and suggestions made in Act II are now made openly in Act III. All manner of impertinent questions are put to her, under the guise of finding out the truth. She is asked her name, her age, and also why she is unmarried. All of these become an opportunity to frame her. There is little evidence of the infanticide that she is accused of. Instead there is an attempt on the part of most of the characters to tarnish her reputation. There is an attempt to present her as an immoral woman of dubious character. All her associations and actions are viewed with jaundiced eyes. In Act II we could tell the difference between a fabricated story and a real one. In Act III we can no longer distinguish the lies from the truth. What are articulated in the course of compiling evidence against her are petty prejudices and a reiteration of hidebound expectations that women are usually buried under in patriarchal societies. Benare's remaining unmarried at the age of thirty four is seen as a deliberate choice of promiscuity and invites the censure of all the characters. No discussion is provided of the men who give evidence against Benare, nor are they cross examined. In fact the differing viewpoints work as the point of view of a cross section of society on the questions of morals and codes prescribed for young women.

By providing such a perspective, Tendulkar is asking us to view critically the mind-set of a society which thrives on two sets of rules; one for men and another for women. We are made aware of the authority wielded by the powerful and the helplessness of the small individuals who are trapped within the snare of antediluvian social mores and constraints. We discover in the course of Act III that Benare has contacted several men and put forward a proposal of marriage. This very detail shocks the characters in the play. We need perhaps to ask why this should be so. After all, in everyday life, marriage proposals/advertisements create a space in which a prospective bridegroom may interview several young women in the process of finding a wife. Why should Benare's quest to find herself a husband be viewed as untoward? Benare herself comes across as far more attractive and intelligent when compared to all the men she supposedly propositioned. Why does each one of them turn her down? The fact that she is pregnant and is looking for support in the form of a father for the child is ostensibly the reason for rejecting her. Benare is not contemplating infanticide. She seeks

instead a secure future for her child in a myopic society. Unfortunately for her, the men she knows and approaches are shown up as pathetic. All they can contribute to her life is scurrilous gossip and exaggerated versions of her plight, which they milk for sagacious detail. This is true of the maternal uncle who exploited her when she was fourteen, Damle, the married professor with five children, who deserts her. It is equally true of the weak and unsupportive Ponkshe and Rokde as also the Chairman of the Education Society who dismisses Benare from her job as a teacher once he finds out that she is unmarried and is carrying a child. All these men, ostensibly the upholders of a society which venerates and glorifies motherhood, will not lift a finger to support an expectant mother. What is even worse is that they do not stop at denying her help. They go out of their way to make her personal and professional life hell. The entire focus of Act III shifts from an investigation of the possibility of infanticide to a gradually constructed narrative of Benare's licentiousness, her immorality and an indictment of her very presence which is seen as a 'canker in society.'

In doing so, Tendulkar exposes the actual culprits in society. Earlier feminist tracts such as the one written by Tarabai Shinde point out the persecution and victimization of women in Benare's situation. Tendulkar joins issue with Tarabai Shinde and her ilk by showing us the actual forces behind such acts of persecution. It is the judges and prosecutors, the respectable men and women in powerful positions in society who are seen as the perpetrators. It is their blinkered vision, and their lack of compassion and humaneness that results in countless infanticides. When they give her ten seconds to speak, this is only a perfunctory gesture. Each of the other characters is probably aware of the real story. Yet none of them want to really approach Benare's problem in a humane manner or treat her with dignity. This is highlighted through the extraordinary sequence during which Benare breaks her silence in Act III and communes with the audience, putting forward her version. You would have noticed that the characters in the play freeze and that at this juncture Benare occupies centre stage. She is eloquent and puts forward a very moving narrative that allows the audience to view her in the light of a vulnerable young woman who has had a raw deal, once as a young girl, and then as a young adult. It is remarkable that she has struggled and survived against such odds and achieved so much. She draws attention to the group that is persecuting her and women in her position by referring to them as 'cultured men of the twentieth century' with ferocious faces, worn out phrases and bellies full of unfulfilled desires.' Despite this powerful indictment, Benare's heartrending soliloquy speaks of her fighting spirit and her commitment to her work, her love for the children she teaches and her passion for life. Her affirmative beliefs evoke a sympathetic chord.

Yet, given the thrust of the play, is there any possibility of a happy conclusion? As we will discover, this is not the case. Benare's soliloquy allows the audience to view her situation from a different perspective. Yet, literally and metaphorically, the characters in the play who represent the community she lives in do not hear her. Her version falls on deaf ears and frozen hearts and brains. Kashikar, the

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judge announces the verdict of the mock trial. Benare is seen as attempting to short circuit all social codes and mores. She is accused of having committed a terrible crime and she is informed that the child in her womb will be destroyed. This is the only punitive solution that the living law court has been able to provide. Tendulkar drives home the horrifying recognition that nothing has really changed in terms of people's attitudes. It usually takes a man and a woman to bring forth a child, irrespective of whether they are married or otherwise. While the offending male is excused, the vulnerable woman, who can very often be a victim is put on trial as in this case and condemned universally. In all such situations, the magnificent act of creation, that is solely the privilege of women, is marginalized as irrelevant. There is a sharp divide between the deification of the mother as goddess and the real flesh and blood mother who is put in the dock. Benare breaks down and puts her head on the table sobbing uncontrollably, on hearing Kashikar's verdict. She says she will not allow them to destroy her child. At this point the mock trial comes to an end and the door to the hallway is unlocked in preparation for the evening's program. Patting her head and cajoling her not to be so sensitive and telling her that it was only a game, all the characters hurry away to prepare for the show. Only Benare lies motionless on the stage. Attempts to persuade her to get up are in vain. Samant comes in and leaves the cloth parrot beside her. The last image on the stage is that of a Benare who struggles to move, but cannot. Like the toy bird, the play ends with a song of a grieving sparrow whose secure world has been destroyed by predators. The play ends here. The focus is on an immobile and broken Benare who has been crushed by the hostility and viciousness of her peers and her community. She is bereft and has no support. Will she rise and recover. The playwright leaves it to us to mull over this fact. Even if Benare were to eventually get up, rehabilitating herself will be an uphill task. She has no economic support, no job, no male protection and she has also been ostracized by society. Her future is deliberately left bleak.

Key Issues under Discussion

Some of the key issues under discussion in the play are:

1. While the play is set in modern independent India that has a constitution that provides equal rights to everyone irrespective of caste creed or gender, Tendulkar's play demonstrates that this is not the case in real life situations.
2. The wielders of authority, the controllers of opinion, the initiators of action are usually powerful people with a long history of support systems. Their understanding of their new role is not as citizens of a democracy, it dates back to a hierarchical socio economic system that is much older.
3. Their notion of social reform and change is largely superficial. As Tendulkar proves, by scratching a little, their deep seated convictions and prejudices are uncovered. It takes very little to rupture the thin façade of emancipation and liberalism that they try to project.

4. Women in this world are still extremely vulnerable and subject to most danger, both in the private sphere and in the public sphere.
5. How is this society, ostensibly free and rational an improvement on that which existed before? Is this the question that the playwright would like the audience to ponder over?
6. This is where the very important role played by literature is highlighted. By creating a real life situation and giving us all the points of view through a host of characters the playwright expects us to mull over the issue, Benare's story ends sadly, but it has definitely alerted us to women's vulnerability and exploitation in patriarchal societies. It has also alerted us to the prejudice and meanness displayed by people in positions of power and control.
7. Like Benare, we as readers, are unable to avenge ourselves on the Damles, Kashikars and Sukhatmes of this world. However, they have been demystified for us. We no longer look at them with awe nor do we feel anything other than anger and contempt for them.
8. The play also sensitizes us to Benare's precarious position in this hostile and unfair society. It also enables us to understand why Mrs. Kashikar and Rokde behave in the way they do. Completely under Kashikar's control, neither of them has the power to break free from him and think differently. They are allowed to survive because they collude with the authority figures and are hostile to Benare, who threatens them by her free thinking and independence.
9. Samant reveals to us the dangers of limited exposure. Despite his best intentions, Samant remains to the end largely uncomprehending of the whole issue.

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Themes

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is known for its artistic ingenuity. According to the critic Arundhati Banerjee, the play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society. The play originated from a real life incident in which Tendulkar happened to overhear a group of amateur players whom he was guiding to their destination, Vile Parle, the Mumbai suburb in which he lived, where the group was going to stage a mock-trial. The play is in the form of a play within a play or a play in the form of a rehearsal. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has depicted the difficulty of a young woman, who is a victim of the male dominated society. Tendulkar has criticized the follies prevailing in the society. The play carries all the vitalities of contemporary life. It focuses on the human mind and detects the ugliness in it. All the plays of Tendulkar are the result of his surveillance of the life, society and different incidents of his own life. It deals with the problem of unmarried motherhood.

Leela Benare is the female protagonist of the play who stands as a rebel against the established values of the orthodox society. Tendulkar has treated the

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character of Ms. Benare with great compassion and understanding while projecting her against the selfish, hypocritical and ambitious male dominated society. By profession, she is a school teacher, sincere and dedicated in her teaching work and an enlightened artist by heart. So, she has joined the amateur theatre group. The other members of the group are Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, Prof. Damle and Mr. Rawte, who belong to the urban middle-class of Mumbai. Leela Benare is totally different from others in the sense that she has a zeal and zest for life. She wants to share her happiness with others but hardly succeeds because her generous nature is not appreciated by her companions. In the exposure of private life of Benare, their inferiority complex reflects frustration and repressed desires of their life. They cannot understand, appreciate and share the joy of others.

According to Shailja Wadikar, 'The character of Leela Benare reminds us of Ibsen's famous character Nora in *A Doll's House*, a womanly woman who tries to face the bitter realities of actual world that is full of hardships and challenges.' Miss Benare is cheated twice in love; first by her maternal uncle and later by Prof. Damle. In the first case, the thing subsides with the passage of time but in the other, she is caught in a trap through a cruel game cunningly played by her companions as her love affair has already been exposed by her pregnancy. At the very beginning of the mock trial, Benare is accused of the charge of infanticide. The mock trial takes a serious turn when her co-actors arrange it in such a cunning manner so as to discuss and dissect her private life. Being isolated and victimized by society, she offers to marry any of her companions but no one comes forward to accept her proposal. On the contrary, she is denied both the right of living as she is dismissed from her job and the right that God has given to a woman to become mother as the sentence is passed to destroy the baby in her womb. Prof. Damle, who is equally responsible for the same crime, goes unnoticed and unpunished. Although Benare's character symbolizes simplicity, innocence and straightforwardness, the character of her fellow companions symbolize meanness and cruelty. Her tragedy reveals the fact that in the male dominated society, a woman's innocence is punished and a man's deliberateness and violence goes scot-free. In the play, Tendulkar throws light on the evil practices inherent in human nature like crookedness, cruelty and violence. Here in the play, the white collar educated and civilized middle-class people become aggressive and violent against their fellow companion who is a female and entertain themselves at the cost of her honour and dignity. Benare suffers for the crime that she has not committed as she says, 'These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires.' In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar directs his criticism against the hypocritical male attitude in Indian society where a woman is quite suppressed and any small attempt by a woman for her freedom is highly deteriorated. Benare's tragedy reveals the fact that women are born to suffer even in the most sophisticated, civilized section of

the society. While tracing the structure of society, his plays hold a mirror to the desires, dreams and despairs of the ordinary people engaged in their day to-day struggle of life. He investigates deep into the human consciousness to find out the causes of their misery and suffering. His plays illustrate human lives stagnating in the mire of lust, greed and violence. Therefore, the study of Vijay Tendulkar's plays will help us to understand his vision of society and human life.

*Vijay Tendulkar: Silence
the Court is in Session*

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Dramatic Techniques Used in the Play

The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique. Vijay Tendulkar is highly realistic not only in the delineation of characters and human relationships, but also in the depiction of the setting in which these characters enact the drama of their lives. The locale of the play is a mofussil town and all the actions of the play take place in a single room.

The theatre group in the play *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* comes to perform at a village is a minuscule cross section of middle class society and the members who belong to the different substrata of the society. The play is radical in its subject and a bit aggressive in tone. Tendulkar set a new trend in Marathi theatre and introduced new themes to the theatre in general. He created a new path leading to a modernistic movement in theatre. The play incurred on Tendulkar the wrath of the censors and of the conservative section of the society. Tendulkar, who is known as the young angry man of Indian theatre created a havoc with the production of this play.

Check Your Progress

3. Which time period is the play set in?
4. Where does the play take place?
5. What are the outstanding characteristic features of the play?
6. What is Leela Benare's profession?

11.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Tendulkar's plays explore the various relationships in society- men's dominance over women, the class divide in the society, the individual (particularly females) expressing freedom in their thoughts, words and deed with those of the society.
2. *Shrimant* explored a rather radical storyline- an unmarried young woman decides to keep her unborn child.

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3. This play is located in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, beliefs, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times.
4. The play takes place in an old community hall, used by the residents of the village for social gathering and performing various activities such as bhajans, wedding etc.
5. The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique.
6. By profession, she is a school teacher, sincere and dedicated in her teaching work and an enlightened artist by heart.

11.5 SUMMARY

- Vijay Tendulkar was a path-breaking theatre writer with international acclaim. In Indian theatre he stands along with other prominent writers such as Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh who have taken Indian drama to a higher level.
- Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born in Kolhapur in the state of Maharashtra on January 6, 1928.
- His creative writing covered a vast span of five decades during which he wrote 27 full-length plays and 25 one-act plays.
- The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is set in the India of 1950, thus documenting the social life, beliefs, values, morals and taboos of the society of those times.
- The plot of the play is inspired from a short story, written in German by a Swiss writer which was translated in English.
- The play depicts newly independent Indian society, experiencing changes owing to modernization and challenges of democracy.
- The protagonist of the play is an unconventional woman. Her experience places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes.
- Keeping the traditional Sanskrit drama style, this play also has major and minor characters. The setting is one single evening. There are young men, a single young woman and a married matured woman in this play.
- According to the critic Arundhati Banerjee, the play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society.
- Although Benare's character symbolizes simplicity, innocence and straightforwardness, the character of her fellow companions symbolize meanness and cruelty.

- The outstanding characteristic features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique.

Vijay Tendulkar: *Silence the Court is in Session*

11.6 KEY WORDS

- **Infanticide:** It refers to the crime of a mother killing her child within a year of birth.
- **Mofussil:** It refers to the regions of India outside the three East India Company capitals of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; hence, parts of a country outside an urban centre; the regions, rural areas.
- **Mock Trial:** It is an act or imitation trial. It is similar to a moot court, but mock trials simulate lower-court trials, while moot court simulates appellate court hearings.
- **Coercive:** It means forcing another party to act in an involuntary manner by use of threats or force.
- **Jaundiced Eyes:** It means a prejudiced view.
- **Ingenuity:** It is the ability to think creatively about a situation or to solve problems in a clever way.

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11.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the life and career of Vijay Tendulkar.
2. Briefly describe the dramatic techniques used in the play.
3. Write a short note on the character of Mr. Kashikar in the play.
4. Summarize the plot of the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'Leela Benare's experiences places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on orthodox social codes.' Discuss with reference to the text.
2. Examine how Tendulkar uses the device of the mock trial to expose the violence inherent in this male dominated patriarchal society.
3. Analyse the similarities between how women were treated during Tarabai Shinde's time and during the period where Tendulkar sets his play.
4. Examine the conclusion of *Silence! The Court is in Session* with references to the text.

11.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 12 CHETAN BHAGAT: *THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE*

Chetan Bhagat:
*The Three Mistakes
of My Life*

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Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 About the Author
- 12.3 The Three Mistakes of My Life: Critical Analysis
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian novelist who began his career as an investment banker but eventually went on to quit his job in order to pursue a career in writing. He has written nine novels in addition to three non-fictional works. He is considered a bestseller in India as his novels are widely read. In this unit, one of his widely popular works, *The Three Mistakes of My Life* has been discussed in detail.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Chetan Bhagat's early life, education and career
- Analyse Bhagat's novel *The Three Mistakes of My Life*

12.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chetan Bhagat was born in Delhi on 22 April 1974 in a traditional Punjabi family. His father served in the Indian Army and his mother worked in the agricultural department. His schooling was fairly privileged in The Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan. Though he was an average student, he succeeded in getting admission in IIT Delhi where he studied Mechanical Engineering. He went on to study MBA from IIM Ahmedabad and graduated in 1997. His alma mater recognised his achievements and honoured him with the Young Alumni Achiever's Award 2018 in the Art and Entertainment category. He was also listed as one of the most influential people in the artist's category by Time magazine in 2010.

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Upon graduating, he worked at in the investment firm Peregrine Investments Holdings in Hong Kong. He was laid off within a few months when the company shut down. Subsequently he worked with Goldman Sachs. He was bored at his job and so spent much of his time in writing his first novel *Five Point Someone*. The novel reminiscences his experiences at IIT Delhi and was made into the movie *3 Idiots*. Recounting the success of the novel, he says that he was pleasantly surprised by its success since all he hoped for was to gift his “hobby book” to friends from IIT. He goes on to say that “It was not meant to launch me on an author’s career, . . . but it changed my life. It gave me a new professional path and a level of recognition I could never have imagined.” Soon he quit and joined Deutsche Bank where he worked till 2006 and was promoted to Vice-President. Around this time his second novel *One Night @ the Call Centre* was published and became an instant best seller. It was only in 2008 that he moved back to India with his family. At this time he was working as Director, distressed assets team, Deutsche Bank in Bombay. His third novel *The 3 Mistakes of my Life* was published the same year. His success in the publishing world allowed him to quit banking and work as a novelist full time. Currently he also writes columns in newspapers in addition to writing novels.

His novels have been successfully adapted for the screen. In fact he won the Filmfare Award for Best Screenplay for *Kai Po Che!*, an adaptation of *3 Mistakes* along with Pubali Chaudri, Abhishek Kapoor and Supratik Sen.

Though Bhagat is read widely, he is not considered a serious novelist and is often critics for his cliched plots and language. His latest novel *One Arranged Murder* is a murder mystery and thriller. In addition to this, he has also published a collection of essay titled *India Positive* dealing with a variety of issues facing the country like unemployment and infrastructure to name a few. His focus is on what can be done to transform the country into a progressive nation.

Bhagat is different from other novelists when it comes to an unabashed pursuit of fame and money. He argues that esoteric ideals are meaningless unless one can maintain a comfortable lifestyle. He insists on connecting prosperity with an improved standard of living. In this, one can see that he taps into the aspirational strain of Indian youth which sees education and a financially viable career as the pathway to a better lifestyle and an escape from the poverty found everywhere. His novels emphasise the value of social recognition as a motivator. In fact while recalling his 10th Board result when he scored 76 per cent he remembers that he was labelled an ‘average student’ by friends and family. He recounts, “I was very uncomfortable with this judgement and felt that I was being written off.” It is this desire to refuse to be labelled as irrelevant that motivated him and led to his academic and financial success. Based on his experiences he realised that success “completely changes how the world receives you, and your own perception of yourself. Suddenly you are. . . .categorised as an ‘achiever.’” He resists labelling and says that he would “hate to call [myself] an intellectual.” He says that he is simply “an earnest observer of happenings around” him and uses these to write. According to him “the growth of social median and [his] connection with the new India have helped my evolution as an influencer of thoughts.”

12.3 THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Chetan Bhagat:
*The Three Mistakes
of My Life*

Chetan Bhagat's novels do not pretend to portray the pressing social issues of the time. In fact if one were to compare the writer of the novels with the writer of the essays in *India Positive*, one might be forgiven for thinking they were written by two different individuals. In his novels he is aiming to entertain the reader. The novels generally deal with the angst of the young, especially the desire to be successful and become financially sound. This might seem to be a very ephemeral issue, but for someone belonging to the generation that saw the license raj and then witnessed the opening up of opportunities post-liberalisation, this is an important issue. Many critics have panned Bhagat for his blatantly commercial writing. This charge can be questioned since it raises fundamental questions about the function of art: if art does not entertain in the first instance then it becomes esoteric and is not read. An artist has to have a wide readership and audience if he or she is to matter not only commercially but also on the creative front. Bhagat is read, and that is his greatest victory. He succeeded because his readers found an echo of their dreams and aspirations in his books. For the youth of a nation which seems to reify poverty and simple living, the ability to chart a new future for themselves is heady indeed. Indian society is extremely hierarchal and values obedience above all else. This is stifling for the young generation. In his novels, the young challenge the status quo in the professions they chose, their love life and sexual adventures and their own perception of the importance of events around them. The reader can witness the 'new India' emerging in his works.

At first glance his novels seem to portray the youth as callous and uncaring of the social issues and discriminations around them. However, the very fact that they do not wallow in despair and seem incapacitated by the problems facing the nation gives hope. One can see this as a marker of a generation that realises that caste and class differences do not matter in a world where one's survival depends on skill enhancement. The struggle is not maintaining class or caste identity, the struggle is to stay relevant in a fast changing and diverse workplace. In other words, there is a spontaneous acceptance of diversity and no value judgement is made for any divergence from whatever may be considered 'normative.' What they out see as 'normative' is being recognised as successful. It cannot be denied that this is not without its own drawbacks. The search for greater economic success leads to a dehumanisation. The modern economic system also results in the exploitation of those at the bottom of the pyramid, especially women, tribals etc. However, Bhagat's characters are very young and have either just entered the workplace or are about to enter it. They are obsessed with their own dress and a desire to explore the freedom that economic prosperity has brought them. This might seem selfish, however this is the first trajectory in the movement from poverty to a larger sense of the place of the individual in the world.

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Moreover, though the novels might seem to focus on the youth and their obsession with success; a criticism on these grounds fails to look at the stress the young feel. There is no place for failure, a single misstep dooms the individual to a lifetime of being treated as an outsider. The desire to belong to the globalised community along with the realisation that they can become obsolete and removed from the same at any moment is felt sharply by the characters at all times.

In his novels Bhagat reflects on contemporary political, social, economic and cultural issues. In *3 Mistakes* the national obsession with cricket is the unifying principle. The central characters obsess over the game. This obsession is shared by millions of young people in the country. The reification of cricket stars and the desire to become like them is indicative of the complete absence of opportunity for young people, especially in the small towns of the country. Govind, for example, dreams of starting a business. However, his strained financial conditions prevent this. Moreover, he is stuck in a small town in Gujarat that does not even have a good institution he can go to. Govind is any young man in the country who dreams but cannot see any way of fulfilling these dreams. Omi is the son of a priest in the local Swamibhakti temple. Ishaan is a talented cricketer and the only one among the trio who can escape the fossilised existence they find themselves in. The three friends start a business selling cricket goods in a shop in the temple premises. They start by envisioning a shop selling top of the line stuff but end up selling cheap toys to visitors to the temple. In the course the novel, they become friends with Ali who is a cricket prodigy. Ishaan coaches him, the friends even take him to Australia where he is offered citizenship to play; however Ali refuses. The novel ends in the conflagration of the Godhra riots as the friends try to protect Ali from the mob out to kill any Muslim they can find. The novel attempts to show the consequences of the religious animus on the young. Though this is done in a melodramatic way, Bhagat's dissatisfaction with religious beliefs and their role in preventing the economic progress of the nation is apparent. The fact that the shop is inside the temple reveals the fact that industry is not averse to exploiting religious beliefs and faith in order to churn out a profit. But the fact that it all ends up in flames is also a warning: religion needs to be divorced from economic activity since no business can prosper in an environment of religious tension. The factor the matters that industry run-on the profit movie and any event that prevents this is anathema for it.

M. A. Orthofer has called it "young-lad-lit, a YA novel content with limited ambitions, trying to convey some sincere messages but entirely lacking in subtlety or finesse." The novel tries to be well-meaning but repeatedly succumbs to clichés and tropes and is "artless." He goes on to call it "pop-fiction of the lights, laziest sort, its tackling of serious real-life issues and incidents giving it a veneer of earnest thoughtfulness that stands up to nothing." This criticism has some merit. The novel legitimately raises the point that regressive religious beliefs and the politics of grievance cannot result in the economic development in the nation. Instead it will do the opposite: any shoots of growth will also be burned out of existence. However, Bhagat never develops this idea to its logical conclusion. The connection

between Govind's desire for success and the consequences of the militant Hinduism of Omi's family is never fully explored. That the connection is real and valid cannot be denied. Again, the novel fails to completely celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth and to clearly criticise the consequences of outmoded thinking and modes of behavior.

The novel moves swiftly, however it remains episodic in nature and the significance of different events is never fully explored. The three friends take Ali to Australia. This visit makes sense since the country was the champion in cricket. Thus there is a recognition of the ability of the youth to accept facts, no matter how unpalatable they may be. The young men do not pretend that India is a great cricketing power. For this reason they take Ali there since only in Australia will his talents be valued, nurtured and find avenues for full expression. Paradoxically, this ability to face reality is absent in the grown-ups in the novel. Omi's parents and others still live in a mythical past where they were the predominant religion, way of life and community. This inability to deal with the present is what incapacitates them and leads to violence. Another interesting idea that is hinted at but never fully developed is the acknowledgement that it is only a belief in the 'idea of India' as espoused by the secular leaders of the country that makes the talented youth stay home. Otherwise they recognise that there are very few occasions for achieving their dreams in the homeland. The inevitability of losing the best minds if things do not change is hinted here. Again Bhagat fails to develop this idea. However in his interviews Bhagat has repeatedly stated that one's personal beliefs need to be separated from public discourse since multinational organisations are wary of investing in countries where they cannot secure their investments.

The visit to Australia builds on the idea of the nation as a large party. The characters go to beaches and generally have a good time. It is almost as if the visit is a slice of life outside the day to day drudgery of life. For example, the novelist hints at, but again, never fully explains what the slow dilution of the idea of their shop to what it eventually becomes does to Govind. No attempt is made to explore how Govind's entrepreneurial spirit reacts to the compromises he has to make in order to sell more in his shop. The reality of doing business in India is thus not grasped. Bhagat is skilful with words and intricately familiar with this aspect of life. This is a missed opportunity since he could have made the novel more than what it is.

The earthquake and the events of 9/11 are never fully integrated into the book. The book nevertheless attempts to chart the journey of these three young boys into adulthood. It tries to pin these three events as the defining events in their lives. The devastation that the earthquake causes is a setback to their business. No attempt is made to explore the consequences of the earthquake on the social fabric of Gujaratis. The impact of lives lost in a senseless natural disaster and the trauma it caused is overlooked. 9/11 in turn led to profound changes in the way International travel occurred, and in the way America viewed the rest of the world, especially those it viewed as outsiders and the 'enemy.' Again the impact of 9/11

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on life in small town Gujarat is never completely explored. It often seems that the novelist has clubbed the major events of the time to create a framework through which the reader is expected to view the lives and relationships of the characters.

In fact the beginning of the novel suggests that the framework is important. The prologue describes the manner in which the author-narrator is appraised of the story. Govind sent him an email which causes the author-narrator to rush to Ahmedabad, from Singapore, in order to talk to Govind and try to understand and give him succour. The reader, in the course of the novel, gets to know the story, but the significance of the events, the development of the characters and their motivations are never fully explored. There are elements of a great story here, however it succumbs to melodrama and Bollywood cliches frequently, and never completely delineates the issues it attempted to touch. Nonetheless the novel is a great swift read and does hint at the desires and aspirations of a developing nation and its citizens.

Check Your Progress

1. Where did Chetan Bhagat work upon graduating?
2. What do Bhagat's novels emphasise?
3. What does the modern economic system result in?

12.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Upon graduating, Bhagat worked at in the investment firm Peregrine Investments Holdings in Hong Kong.
2. Chetan Bhagat's novels emphasise the value of social recognition as a motivator.
3. The modern economic system also results in the exploitation of those at the bottom of the pyramid, especially women, tribals etc.

12.5 SUMMARY

- Chetan Bhagat was born in Delhi on 22 April 1974 in a traditional Punjabi family. His father served in the Indian Army and his mother worked in the agricultural department.
- Bhagat was bored at his job and so spent much of his time in writing his first novel *Five Point Someone*. The novel reminiscences his experiences at IIT Delhi and was made into the movie *3 Idiots*.

- Bhagat argues that esoteric ideals are meaningless unless one can maintain a comfortable lifestyle. He insists on connecting prosperity with an improved standard of living. In this, one can see that he taps into the aspirational strain of Indian youth which sees education and a financially viable career as the pathway to a better lifestyle and an escape from the poverty found everywhere.
- At first glance Bhagat's novels seem to portray the youth as callous and uncaring of the social issues and discriminations around them. However, the very fact that they do not wallow in despair and seem incapacitated by the problems facing the nation gives hope.
- The novel *The Three Mistakes of My Life* attempts to show the consequences of the religious animus on the young. Though this is done in a melodramatic way, Bhagat's dissatisfaction with religious beliefs and their role in preventing the economic progress of the nation is apparent.
- The earthquake and the events of 9/11 are never fully integrated into the book. The book nevertheless attempts to chart the journey of these three young boys into adulthood. It tries to pin these three events as the defining events in their lives.

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12.6 KEY WORDS

- **Esoteric:** It refers to something that is intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest.
- **Ephemerality:** It is the concept of things being transitory, existing only briefly.
- **Liberalisation:** It is the lessening of government regulations and restrictions in an economy in exchange for greater participation by private entities.
- **Dehumanization:** It is the denial of full humanness in others and the cruelty and suffering that accompanies it. A practical definition refers to it as the viewing and treatment of other persons as though they lack the mental capacities that are commonly attributed to human beings.

12.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What have critics panned Bhagat for?
2. What has Orthofer criticized Bhagat for?
3. Write a short note on the characters' visit to Australia.

Chetan Bhagat:
*The Three Mistakes
of My Life*

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Elaborate upon the portrayal of youth in Bhagat's novels.
2. Discuss Bhagat's reflections on contemporary political, social, economic and cultural issues in his novels.

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

Hoskote, Ranjit. 2002. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books India.

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BLOCK - IV
FICTION

R.K. Narayan:
Sweets for Angels

UNIT 13 R.K. NARAYAN:
SWEETS FOR ANGELS

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Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 About the Author
- 13.3 *Sweets for Angels*: Critical Analysis
- 13.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.8 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

R.K. Narayan was an Indian writer who is remembered for his work set in the fictional town of Malgudi which was first introduced in the novel *Swami and Friends*. He depicted the everyday lives of his characters in an interesting manner while simultaneously touching upon some important issues prevailing in the society of his time. His writing is unpretentious and natural with characters that are relatable. In this unit, one of Narayan's short stories *Sweets for Angels* has been discussed.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss R.K. Narayan's early life and career
- Analyse Narayan's writing style
- Describe Narayan's short story *Sweets for Angels*

13.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. K. Narayan was born in Madras on 10 October, 1906 into an Iyer Vadama Brahmin family. He was one of six sons in a family consisting of eight siblings. Laxman, the famous cartoonist, was his youngest brother. Narayan's early schooling was in the school where his father was headmaster. However since he had to

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travel frequently, the young boy spent a lot of time with his maternal grandmother, Parvati. It was she who gave him the nickname, *Kunjappa*. She also taught him math, classical Indian music and Sanskrit. She also introduced him to Indian mythology. He studied in various schools, until finally moving to Maharajah's College High School, when his father was transferred there. The massive and rich library further fed his desire for books and reading. Though he was interested in literature and reading, it took him four years to complete his bachelor's degree. He did not pursue his master's since he realised that it would destroy his love of reading. Instead he worked as a school teacher. However he quit when he was asked to substitute for the physical education teacher. This event convinced him that he needed to quit and focus solely on his writing career; and he did just that. A review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th century England* was his first published work. Over the years he wrote articles, book reviews and sundry pieces for various magazines and newspapers. Though he did not earn a lot, support from friends and family and his own frugality meant that he could get by on the meagre income.

In 1930 he wrote *Swami and Friends*, set in the imaginary town of Malgudi. The book is the first authentic children's book by an Indian writer. Though it went on to become a favourite and a cult classic, it was rejected by a string of publishers. The novel and the others that followed depict the experiences and adventures of Swami and his friends. Though the scope of the novel is very limited, and all the action takes place within the confines of colonial rule, the depiction challenges this colonisation very subtly. The innocence of childhood and the reality of harsh British rule are very finally balanced.

In 1933, while on a visit to his sister in Coimbatore, Narayan met and fell in love with 15 year old Rajam. Despite his unstable financial condition, and unfavourable horoscope alignments, the two married. Soon after Narayan began working in *The Justice* as a reporter. The paper focused on the fight for rights of non-Brahmins. Narayan, being a Brahmin Iyer, espousing the cause was exciting and revolutionary for the publishers. It was during his stint here that the novelist interacted with a large cross-section of society and this made him cognizant of the struggle and issues concerning people beyond the limited group he had interacted with earlier. It was around this time that a friend of his showed the manuscript of *Swami and Friends* to Graham Greene. The latter was so impressed by the work that he forwarded it to his publishers who then brought out the book. The book was recognised as one of the BBC's 100 Notes that Shaped Our World in 2019. His second novel *A Bachelor of Arts* was semi-autobiographical and based on his experiences in college. The theme of *The Dark Room* was domestic disharmony. *The Financial Expert* is considered his masterpiece. It is based on the life of Margayya, a financial genius. We can see that even his novels and their perception of life evolved as the writer grew. His wife, Rajam's, death by typhoid in 1939 was the inspiration behind *The English Teacher*. This is his most autobiographical novel and deals with issues of loss, and his own emotions during

this difficult time. He also began a journal *Indian Thought* which stopped within a year since the novelist couldn't manage it. His publication house, Indian Thought Publication, however was very successful and is currently managed by his granddaughter. Michigan State University Press published his works in the US in 1953.

Narayan's growing success and fame finally allowed him to earn enough to build his own home which was completed in 1953. It is worth noting that though his writings attempt to reveal social structures and the discrepancies and exploitation that lie at the heart of this structuring, he ensured that his own daughter had a traditional marriage adhering to all traditional rituals. After the wedding, he travelled to America. It was while he was here that he wrote *The Guide* and *My Dateless Diary* (based on the diary he kept of this visit). It was on this trip that he finally met Graham Greene in England. He went on to write and publish the highly entertaining *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. In 1946 he published *Gods, Demons and Others*, a collection of stories from the epics popular in the subcontinent. Over his vast literary career he also wrote a book promoting tourism for the Karnataka government. He republished it later under the title *The Emerald Route*. In his later years, while living alone in the house he built, he tried his hand at farming. He would also visit the local market to observe and interact with the people. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1980. During his tenure there he focused on one topic: the plight of school-going children, especially the heavy physical burden they had to carry in their school bags. He argued that the bags, encouraged rote learning and oiled originality and the questioning spirit in children. It was his incessant questioning of the status quo that resulted in the formation of a committee under Prof Yash Pal to study the current education system and suggest reforms and changes to the same.

When he fell ill he moved close to his daughter in Coimbatore. However when she died of cancer, his granddaughter began to take care of him and the publication house he had established. His last novel, *The Grandmother's Tale*, deals with the life story of his grandmother who eloped with his grandfather to marry him.

He was a major figure in Indian literature in English along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. His greatest contribution in bringing small town India, with its idiosyncratic characters and attitudes, alive before his audience.

He died on 13 May, 2001 after a short illness. In his last years he was a close friend of N. Ram, the editor of *The Hindu*. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for his contribution to Indian literature.

His style

Narayan's works draw from his experiences and are often semi-autobiographical in tone and content. It seems that he employs his writing to work out his own emotional pain and traumas. *The Guide* with its evocative emotions and ambivalent conclusion is typical of his writing prowess.

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His style was simple and unpretentious. The simplicity was evocative of a simpler time of childhood, or past of the characters concerned when they did not have to grapple with grown-up issues. His characters were the people we meet in everyday life: friends, relatives and neighbours. Through these interactions he dramatises the demands of society as opposed to the confusions on individuality. He employed the cadence of Tamil speech in the dialogues of his characters. Thus he could give, what Jhumpa Lahiri calls, a complete insight into the lives of his characters. His brevity speaks volumes as he depicts the daily hum-drum of middle class life in India. While talking about Narayan's style, V. S. Naipaul said that he "wrote from deep within his community" without ever putting them "on display."

Another feature of his writing is that it is extremely descriptive in nature. However, his ability to detach himself from miswriting allows him to be extremely analytical in his approach. This in turn allows him to be more authentic in his writing. Thus, even as his writing is humorous, it evokes the energy of ordinary life and displays compassionate humanism.

13.3 *SWEETS FOR ANGELS*: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The short story *Sweets for Angels* centres around the image of the character Kali. He is a huge man who is valued for his physical prowess and appearance. The very name Kali evokes images of a large swarthy man capable of violence. The confluence of the name and the feelings it evokes make the townspeople wary of him. Everyone is afraid of him and avoids him. Without ever interacting with him, or even attempting to understand how he feels, they assume that he is a person prone to violence, and in fact revels in it. However, as the text reveals the perception and the reality of Kali are in complete opposition. Far from being an ogre, Kali is a docile, kindly man who does not wish to harm anyone. In fact he wishes to give sweets to the children he meets. When he sees the children, he sees innocence and potential in them. Kali also sees the opportunities that he wasn't given. Thus when he sees the children he is reminded of what he could have been but never could be. This idea works on a variety of levels. His experiences as a student and as a teacher make him conscious of the fact that education focuses on moulding children into what society thinks is a 'good' child and citizen, instead of allowing them to explore their ideas, beliefs and identities so that they can become well-rounded contributing members of society. The constraints that the education system puts on children is hinted here. The story also highlights the hierarchical nature of Indian society where individuals are not seen and judged on the basis of who they are and how they behave. Instead society tends to judge and condemn individuals on the basis of caste, religion or group that they belong to. Thus instead of allowing freedom, individuals find themselves restricted by these preconceived notions of morality; perception matters more than reality.

The townspeople suspect Kali of alluring children in an attempt to kidnap them when he gives them sweets. No one even suggests that he could be doing

this simply because he likes children and wishes to share in their happiness and ability to take joy in the simple pleasures of life; enjoying sweets, for instance. At no point in the story are Kali's motivations, or the responses of the children deemed important. It is the perception of the residents of the town and their response to this perception that is accepted ipso facto. Without emphasising this point, Narayan very smartly raises the question as to the kind of society we find ourselves in. He points out that this is a nation that values conformity above all else; once society has defined roles and motivations to groups and individuals all actions are perceived and judged through this veil of prejudice. The story emphatically brings the fundamental close mindedness of society to the fore. In other words, Narayan also raises questions about the need for a reorientation in society.

The story is interesting because it raises the possibility of what could be if society had the ability to view individuals for what they are rather than what they are perceived to be. He suggests that if this were possible one would be able to create a truly free and fair society. The difference between the section of the children and the grownups to Kali also points out the fact that at some point of time we lose our ability to empathise with those that are different from us. And this is truly tragic. The very act of violence with which people react to Kali, though abhorrent, also, paradoxically is the writer's way of celebrating diversity in the nation. India is a diverse nation with a variety of cultures, religious and political beliefs, ethnicities etc.

The only way the nation will prosper is if they are all granted legitimacy and allowed to prosper and co-exist. Through the violence, Narayan highlights the fact that every individual and community is an outsider and a misfit in a different part of the country. Therefore while one may subject violence on the other in one part, one may find oneself the victim of a similar violence in another part of the country. Therefore the only way of prospering is allowing, accepting and celebrating this diversity.

The story also depicts the close friendship between Kali, Kuppan and the blind beggar. All the three characters belong to the margins of society. They are in many ways suspects and the rejects of society. They find themselves alone at the end of the story, and offer emotional succour to each other. This is an interning reality that Narayan is depicting. The author seems to be suggesting that mainstream society feels no hesitation in rejecting those it sees as outsiders. It also suggests that once one is seen to occupy the margins there is no way back into the mainstream. In other words the writer raises questions about the nature of development and nation building that he sees around him. The story also suggests that all efforts by these marginalised characters are doomed to fail. Again the project of the idea of India is under the scanner.

Even though Kali may desire to be more than what society sees him to be, the story argues that such an opportunity will never be made available to him. The violence with which this message is brought home reveals the viciousness of the hidden biases that undergird Indian society. Thus without even saying a single word about the same, the author has put the entire idea of a new modern India under a cloud.

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Another fact that the story repeatedly emphasizes is that it is the children's ability to read and write that draws Kali to them. He compares this with his illiterate status and wishes he could remedy it. The violence then is indicative of the virulent hatred of the upper classes and the castes of Indian society at any attempts by those belonging to the lower strata of society to improve their place in the world. The writer thus also emphasizes that characters like Kali, the blind beggar and Kuppan will continue to remain marginal until they too can gain access to education and earn an opportunity to improve their lot in life. The violence then is more than a mere fear for the children's safety, or even a desire to keep people in their place; it is an attempt to cower marginal communities into accepting their subservient petitions so that exploitative political, economic and social structures and systems can continue without any challenge. The fact that Kali feels that he could have been more and therefore wishes to connect in whatever manner he can with the children has to be suppressed in violence. If this faintly felt emotion isn't completely squashed it could find expression in an actual attempt to learn reading and writing. If this were to occur the vague feeling of disquiet that Kali has for being judged for his physical appearance would grow into a political awareness of his exploitation. This would then lead to a struggle for his rights and a demand for equality. This in turn would impact the privileged status of those who attack him. Thus the attack has to be vicious, it has to ensure that Kali never interacts with the children again. Only then will the people be able to ensure that he never feels the desire to read and write. The writer makes it clear that it is relevant if either party is aware of the true motivations of their actions. It is the underlying assumption and the desirable outcomes of the actions that are important.

Check Your Progress

1. What was Narayan's first published work?
2. What do Narayan's writings attempt to reveal?
3. What does Narayan point out in *Sweets for Angels*?

13.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. A review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th century England* was Narayan's first published work.
2. Narayan's writings attempt to reveal social structures and the discrepancies and exploitation that lie at the heart of this structuring.
3. In *Sweets for Angels*, points out that this is a nation that values conformity above all else; once society has defined roles and motivations to groups and individuals all actions are perceived and judged through this veil of prejudice.

13.5 SUMMARY

- A review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th century England* was Narayan's first published work. Over the years he wrote articles, book reviews and sundry pieces for various magazines and newspapers.
- In 1930 he wrote *Swami and Friends*, set in the imaginary town of Malgudi. The book is the first authentic children's book by an Indian writer. Though it went on to become a favourite and a cult classic, it was rejected by a string of publishers.
- Narayan's second novel *A Bachelor of Arts* was semi-autobiographical and based on his experiences in college. The theme of *The Dark Room* was domestic disharmony.
- Narayan's works draw from his experiences and are often semi-autobiographical in tone and content. It seems that he employs his writing to work out his own emotional pain and traumas.
- Through these interactions he dramatises the demands of society as opposed to the confusions on individuality. He employed the cadence of Tamil speech in the dialogues of his characters.
- The story *Sweets for Angels* highlights the hierarchical nature of Indian society where individuals are not seen and judged on the basis of who they are and how they behave. Instead society tends to judge and condemn individuals on the basis of caste, religion or group that they belong to.
- At no point in the story are Kali's motivations, or the responses of the children deemed important. It is the perception of the residents of the town and their response to this perception that is accepted ipso facto.
- The story is interesting because it raises the possibility of what could be if society had the ability to view individuals for what they are rather than what they are perceived to be. He suggests that if this were possible one would be able to create a truly free and fair society.
- The violence is indicative of the virulent hatred of the upper classes and the castes of Indian society at any attempts by those belonging to the lower strata of society to improve their place in the world.

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13.6 KEY WORDS

- **Frugality:** It is the quality of being frugal, sparing, thrifty, prudent or economical in the consumption of consumable resources such as food, time or money, and avoiding waste, lavishness or extravagance.

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- **Colonisation:** It refers to the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.
- **Humanism:** It is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.

13.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on *Swami and Friends*.
2. What do Narayan's works draw from?
3. What constraints does education put on children?
4. Which fact does Narayan highlight through the depiction of violence in *Sweets for Angels*?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the initial works of Narayan and their themes.
2. Elaborate upon Narayan's writing style.
3. Analyse how society prevents the marginalised from improving their circumstances.

13.8 FURTHER READINGS

Hoskote, Ranjit. 2002. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books India.

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UNIT 14 RAJA RAO: *KANTHAPURA*

Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 About the Author
- 14.3 *Kanthapura*: Critical Analysis
- 14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.8 Further Readings

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14.0 INTRODUCTION

Raja Rao is known to be one of the most respected and honoured Indian writer of English language novels and short stories. All his works are characterized by Hinduism. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) established Raja Rao as one of the finest Indian stylists. *Kanthapura*, based on the Indian independence struggle, depicts the impact Mahatma Gandhi had on the psyche of Indians. Based in a small, obscure village, the novel takes the readers on the journey of Moorthy. In this unit, we will discuss in detail Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the literary career of Raja Rao
- Critically analyse the novel *Kanthapura*
- Describe the major themes used in *Kanthapura*
- Examine the narrative technique used in *Kanthapura*

14.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raja Rao was born on 8 November, 1908, in Hassan, in the state of Mysore into a well-known Brahmin family. He was the eldest of nine siblings (two brothers and seven sisters). His father taught Kannada at Nizam College in what was then Hyderabad State. His mother died when he was four and that left a lasting impression on the novelist. This may also be the reason of orphanhood being a recurring

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theme in his novels. Another influence from early life was his grandfather, with whom he stayed in Hassan and Harihalli.

Rao was educated at Muslim schools, the Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad and the Aligarh Muslim University, where he became friends with Ahmed Ali. He began learning French at the University. After matriculation in 1927, Rao returned to Hyderabad and studied for his degree at Nizam's College. After graduating from the University of Madras, having majored in English and history, he won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad in 1929, for study abroad for which he joined University of Montpellier in France. He studied French language and literature, and later at the Sorbonne in Paris, he explored the Indian influence on Irish literature. He married Camille Mouly, who taught French at Montpellier, in 1931. The marriage lasted until 1939.

Returning to India in 1939, he edited with Iqbal Singh, *Changing India*, an anthology of modern Indian thought from Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In 1943-1944 he co-edited with Ahmed Ali a journal from Bombay called 'Tomorrow.' It is in this phase of activism that *Kanthapura* was conceived. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, *Sri Vidya Samiti*, devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization; this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, he was also associated with *Chetana*, a cultural society for the propagation of Indian thought and values.

In 1988, he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.

Rao eventually settled in the United States and was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin from 1966 to 1983, when he retired as Emeritus Professor. Courses he taught included Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian philosophy: The Upanishads, Indian philosophy: The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle, and Razor's Edge. One of his students and literary critic Robert D King fondly recalls his experiences as Rao's student:

'...it is as teacher that I know Raja Rao best... Raja Rao began his formal affiliation with the University [of Texas] as a member of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1966... He was a campus icon, acclaimed for his lectures on Buddhism and Eastern thought.'

Raja Rao would deny that he is a teacher, and above all that he is a guru—no, above all not a guru. He shuns those designations. But there he is wrong. He is a teacher, a guru, and a generation of his Texas students are the witnesses. His method is subtle, seductive, humorous at times. I do not think Raja Rao is aware of whether he is talking to a class or to many people or to only one person. It is always a subdued discourse, a monologue at times, quiet, level, steady. ...

‘Raja Rao’s lesson, though I could not absorb it whole at any one time, has always been that we must each of us seek our way to salvation in our own way. It is a lonely search, not communal; each man is alone. Out of our emptiness will come knowledge, understanding, forgiveness—all that matters. There is only the One Way: not Indian, not Western, but both. Never the dualistic Either-Or; always the monistic Both-And. The secrets lie in our own hearts. ... “His message, I have now come to know, is not so much knowledge and understanding as it is something very close to the supreme achievement of love. Or perhaps it is simply love.”

That, in the end, is what we all learnt from Raja Rao, Our Teacher. We learnt love. That is our debt, a debt that can never be repaid in full but only in karmic installments, of which this is one.’

In 1965, he married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. They have one son, Christopher Rama. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married his third wife, Susan, whom he met when she was a student at the University of Texas in the 1970s. Rao died on July 8, 2006 at Austin, Texas, at the age of 97.

Check Your Progress

1. What does ‘rope’ and ‘serpent’ refer to in Raja Rao’s novel *The Serpent and the Rope*?
2. What reasons are given for orphanhood to be a recurring theme in Raja Rao’s novel?

14.3 KANTHAPURA: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The summary of this novel has been divided into various subsections, each relating an important event or plot movement within the story. It should be noted that this section is not intended to substitute a firsthand reading of the novel. You should read this section only after reading the whole work and it will serve as a good reminder of the main events, characters and issues that you encountered while reading it.

1. Kanthapura: A Small Indian Village

The story of the novel is set in Kanthapura, a small, obscure village in a remote corner of south India. Rao seems to be drawing from his memory of Hassan and Harihalli in conceptualizing the nature of this state.

The people here are mostly poor, illiterate and backward. The village is ridden with three major ills: caste, class and toddy. Different quarters in it house people of different castes—the highest caste being Brahmins, the lowest, the Pariahs. But despite the ills, people from different castes and classes manage to live harmoniously accommodating peacefully the demands one makes on the other. People are also extremely religious-minded and at least among the lower classes Goddess Kenchamma is the presiding deity enshrined in the village temple.

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2. Village Katha Man's Arrest

The protagonist of the novel is a young Brahmin boy, named Moorthy. Moorthy was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Although he had never met Gandhi personally, he had read enough of his ideas and heard about his speeches to be influenced by his ideas and had even seen him once in a vision. What appealed to him in Gandhi's ideas was the quest for the realization of equality among all and based on this, the need to resist British occupation through non-violent protest.

One day Moorthy found a half-buried linga in the village. He dug it out, installed it at another place and built a temple there. This temple soon became the center of social life in the village. Moorthy arranged various religious ceremonies and *kathas* here. One day one of the speakers who delivered the *katha* named Jayaramachar mixed his *kathas* with political propaganda. Instead of speaking only about the gods and parables he introduced the villagers to the ideals of Gandhi and the need to free the country from British occupation and slavery. Religious and political messages mixed inseparably in his story with religious figures and events becoming a metaphor for the political condition of the country and how it could be improved.

The foreign government got a wind of this and arrested him. The Government was on the lookout for the first stirrings of nationalism and resistance to the British in the village and when it noticed it, it tried to contain the stirrings with force. In one sense this was the first instance in Kanthapura when an external entity had interfered with their religious actions and had prevented them from doing something that they so ardently desired. The villagers were quick to sense the desire to control and exploit that the British government was trying to direct at them.

3. Awakening Against Foreign Exploitation

Sensing trouble, the British administration posted a policeman, Bade Khan to keep an eye on the villager's activities. Being a Mohammendan and being perceived as an instrument of foreign control, he could get no accommodation in the village. The sahib of the neighbouring Skeffington Coffee estate fearfully referred to as Hunter Sahib (probably because he carried a whip or was fond of hunting or both) opened a hut for him and lodged him in his estate.

Meanwhile Moorthy's political exposure grows. The congress committee of the nearby Karwar city influenced Moorthy immensely who came back to the village with lots of congress literature and wearing home-spun khaddar. One of the messages he has brought into the village related to Gandhi's call of *swadeshi*: discard foreign cloths and thus stop the economic exploitation of Indians by foreigners. Use of indigenously manufactured khaddar was to have manifold effects: not only would it generate employment for a host of unemployed Indians, specially women, making them self-dependent, it would also stop the sale of British manufactured textiles thereby resisting the colonial use of India as a market by the

colonizing powers. Khaddar would generate a distinct visual identity for the Indians which would have potent political implications in the national movement.

Raja Rao: Kanthapura

4. Moorthy Excommunicated

Moorthy, in fact, had turned into a follower of Gandhi since he saw the Mahatma in a vision. He then discarded his foreign clothes, adopted khadi and returned to his village Kanthapura. In one sense he was bringing city-bred ideas to the village. Here he preached Gandhi's ideals of truth and *ahimsa* to the villagers. Though a Brahmin, he began to mix freely with the pariahs in an effort to spread the Gandhian message far but also because he wanted to practice the political ideal of liberty and equality in his personal life.

Bhatta, the village Brahmin did not like this. What Bhatta saw in Moorthy's actions was not a conscious political programme that would free them from British control but its logical corollary—an attack against the centuries old caste-system which kept the Brahmins at the center of social and religious power. He complained against Moorthy to the religious head of the region, called the Swami. Swami was an orthodox Brahmin and an agent of the British government. Realizing the kind of challenge the Gandhi man posed to the power structure operating within the society, the swami excommunicated Moorthy. The excommunication caused severe shock to Moorthy's mother and she died of grief.

Moorthy now began to live with the Rangamma, a childless widow of the village. Rangamma was an educated lady and was a supporter of Moorthy, the freedom fighter. Moorthy was now on the religious, moral and political periphery of his society and it is from this periphery that he began his political struggle decisively.

5. Violence in Skeffington Coffee Estate

The Skeffington coffee estate was spread over a vast sprawling expanse in the neighbourhood of Kanthapura. The owner of the Estate, an Englishman, ruled the coolies with an iron hand, using their physical labour in an unrestricted way and freely using their womenfolk for sexual ends. It was a veritable slavery under a lone slave master and his system.

Once the two Brahmin clerks on the estate invited Moorthy to create an awakening among the pariahs there both by teaching them how to read and write and exposing them to the ideals of Gandhian politics. As Moorthy approached the gate of the coffee estate, Bade Khan hit him with his lathi. The pariahs at the estate sided with Moorthy and attacked Bade Khan. Moorthy reminded his followers to remain non-violent which stopped the fight, but the violence left Moorthy sad and sorrowful.

A pariah named Rachanna was thrown out of the coffee estate, along with his family, for beating the policeman severely. He began to live in Kanthapura and became a strong congress worker.

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6. Moorthy's Three Day Fast

Moorthy held himself responsible for the violence at the coffee estate and felt the need to purify himself. So he undertook a fast for three days. Fasting was another stock Gandhian practice. Fasting when directed against an erring system was supposed to put moral pressure on the system to accept the wrongs committed and undo them. When directed against the self for a mistake committed by the self, fasting worked not only as a penance but also as a purification ritual.

Both these effects are evident in Moorthy's life. At the conclusion of the fast, he felt his whole inner being over brimming with love for all mankind. The world seemed to be bathed in a new light. He felt happy and satisfied. He walked out to preach 'don't-touch-the government campaign'.

7. Kanthapura Congress Committee Formed

Moorthy's next step was organizing his political activities better. He contacted various people and succeeded in establishing the Kanthapura Congress Committee. Moorthy was unanimously elected the president of the congress committee, with Range Gowada, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu as the other office bearers. The committee had twenty three members. They vowed to spin every day, practice ahimsa and seek truth. The larger aim obviously was to begin a grass root level political movement based on Gandhian values that could fight for the freedom of their motherland.

8. Moorthy Arrested

One night the police arrived at Rangamma's house and arrested Moorthy. When people protested, they were beaten. This time, however, Moorthy's supporters were non-violent. Seventeen of them were beaten and were taken to the Santur police station, where they were beaten again and eventually set free. Moorthy was taken away to Kanwar jail and a case of political conspiracy against the state and inciting villagers to use violence against the police lodged against him.

Eminent lawyers like Sankar and Ranganna met him in the prison and offered to contest his case but Moorthy declined any legal aid, asserting that truth was its best self-defense. His stand was that truth, if it was genuine, was self-evident and did not need to be bolstered by a lawyer's arguments. Standing unrepresented in the court, Moorthy was sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment by the British Judge. A pall of gloom spread over Kanthapura. People fasted in protest but none of them could think of a strategy to counter this injustice of the British.

9. Kanthapura Women's Volunteer Corps Founded

As the political energies of the people of Kanthapura recuperated in Moorthy's absence, Rangamma became active. She thought of forming a woman's volunteer crops or sevika sangha. She inspired the women of Kanthapura by telling them stories about historic patriotic women who had devoted their lives to resisting the

British like Maharani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Rajput princess, Sarojini Naidu, etc. Thus she instilled in them the courage to fight for the freedom of their country, but in the Gandhian non-violent manner. Soon the women's volunteer corps in Kanthapura was formed and became active.

10. Moorthy Released

Three months later in the month of Vaisakh came the news that Moorthy was going to be released. On the appointed day, the people of Kanthapura erected victory arches and gathered to welcome their hero. But the police brought Moorthy to Rangamma's house through a secret route. When people learnt this, they gathered there, shouting slogans like 'Mahtama Gandhi ki jai' and 'Vande Matram'. The crowd was asked to disperse peacefully and they obeyed because that was their leader's wish as well. People noticed no change in Moorthy. He was, to use the author's words, "as ever—as ever".

Imprisonment hadn't saddened Moorthy therefore freedom did not elate him. Like a true Gandhian he had learnt to keep his feelings in control even under extreme provocation and had also learnt to hate the colonial system not the people who administered it on him.

11. Gandhi's Dandi March

On the news of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March, Moorthy told the villagers that the Mahatma had left for the Dandi beach, along with eighty-two of his followers. He would prepare salt here and would break the salt law. The people of Kanthapura joined Mahatma Gandhi in his venture. The very moment Gandhi was supposed to make salt, the villagers took batch, led by Moorthy, and shouted: 'Mahatma Gandhi ji ki jai'. Then came the news that Gandhi had been arrested for breaking the salt law which prohibited people from manufacturing the essential salt for their own use and forced them to buy imported salt from the market.

People were filled with resentment against the foreign government and were prepared to make any sacrifice for their Mahatma. Gandhi's march had managed to bring back the spirit of political protest into the people that had been disoriented because of Moorthy's arrest.

12. Boranna's Toddy Grove Picketing

Moorthy addressed meeting of the Kanthapura Congress inspired by the next step in Gandhi's struggle against the British. First it was swadeshi, and then the voluntary breaking of law in the Dandi March and now it was the non-cooperation and swarajya movements. The movement entailed complete withdrawal of cooperation in all forms with the British government. He told them that they would not pay the taxes, the land revenue and would establish a parallel government. Ranga Gowda would be their Patel and they would refuse to recognize the new Patel of the foreign government. Moorthy gave a clarion-call for a struggle against the British government but he stressed that their struggle must remain non-violent.

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As a part of the next campaign- an anti-alcohol drive, it was decided to picket Boranna's toddy grove. On the appointed day, Moorthy marched at the head of one hundred and thirty people to the toddy grove. The police tried to stop their march, but they didn't stop. They forced open the gates of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Rachanna and others rushed into the estate climbed the trees and began to break the twigs and branches. The police deployed in strength, rained lathi blows on the satayagrahis. Many of them were caught, loaded in lorries and left in the far off jungles at the time of night. Cartmen on their way back brought them back to the village.

One another day Moorthy and his satayagrahis picketed Boranna toddy booth outside the coffee estate where the coolies of the coffee estate were brought to spend on drinking. As the coolies moved towards the booth, the stayagrahis sat in the front of the shop, blocking their way. The police beat the coolies to drive them into the satayagrahis. Upon this assault the freedom fighters stood close-knit, leaving no space for coolies. Helpless in breaking the movement, the police rained lathis blows on the freedom fighters yet again.

13. Police Brutalities and Repression

The news of picketing spread in the neighbouring areas. As a result, as many as twenty-six toddy booths were closed down in the vicinity of Kanthapura. Moorthy had become a hero for them. Many came to meet this great man when the imprisoned satayagrahis returned to Kanthapura after their release. The satyagrahis narrated harrowing tales of police brutalities on them inside in the jail.

Soon, the British government intensified its repression on the people of Kanthapura. A new Patel was appointed and people were told to pay the revenue. Only a few obeyed. All the others refused to pay under Moorthy's instructions. Then one morning, people found a heavy posse of police over Kanthapura. To the accompaniment of the beating of drums, the new beadle announced that the people must pay the revenue or be prepared to pay a punitive tax. Moorthy however allayed the fears of the people, promising them full support of the freedom fighters. Haunted by apprehensions, the people kept awake all that night, but nothing happened.

One morning, the people of Kanthapura found that the thirty-three coolies who had escaped from the Coffee Estate were being marched back to the estate by the police. Moorthy, Rangamma and others had been arrested and taken away during the night. Women and children came out and pelted stones at the police. The police beat the children and tried to molest the women. While running away from the chasing police a seven month pregnant woman gave birth to the baby in the open itself. The police locked the temple door from outside where the upper caste protesters had taken shelter from the police and they stayed there hungry and thirsty. It was only early in the morning, after the police had left, that one of the lower class women rescued them.

14. Police Firing on Satyagrahis and the End

The misfortunes of the people of Kanthapura were not over. One day the sahibs, along with the city coolies arrived and announced that the lands of the people were going to be auctioned for the non-payment of land revenue. As the night fell, the city coolies began to reap the fields. The people of Kanthapura took out a procession. The procession was given the look of a religious one, but they eventually started shouting political slogans. The police rushed at them with lathis. The coolies from the Skeffington Coffee Estate and the cities coolies from the fields joined them. Many satyagrahis were wounded others ran away and escaped to another village Kashipur. Almost one year and two months later, thirty refugees from Kanthapur had settled in Kashipur. They often recalled those turbulent days in Kanthapura and missed their fellow men who were either dead or in jail. On the whole the people had the satisfaction that they had done something for their country. When however Gandhiji signed a truce the British Viceroy leaned towards Jawaharlal Nehru who was more practical than the Mahatma. But people, by and large looked upon Gandhi as Lord Ram who would slay Ravana, the British and free Sita, their motherland.

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Major Characters in *Kanthapura*

Given below are the important characters in the novel *Kanthapura*:

Moorthy

Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.

Moorthy begins by challenging the villagers' presuppositions and ideas about hierarchy. Moorthy is the character that inspires the women in the village to embrace change and teaches people not to relent in his beliefs, even when subjected to force and abuse. It is here that Rao's characterization of Moorthy is most compelling. Moorthy becomes a signifier of something clicking in Rao's thought that such a force is indeed active in the country and can be personified in the form of a literary character.

Rangamma

She is a wealthy young Brahmin who is converted by Moorthy to Gandhi's views. Widely respected but lonely because of the death of her husband, she doesn't really give up and is definitely not dejected with life. She reads extensively and nurtures curiosity about other countries. As the freedom struggle grows, she publishes a weekly political pamphlet and sponsors daily discussions on the

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nationalist movement, turning her home into Kanthapura's center for Congress Party activities. Bold in a traditionalist context, she refutes Bhatta's self-serving religiosity and inspires many villagers to follow Gandhi's teachings. When Moorthy is imprisoned and her father, a Vedantic teacher, dies, she continues both as an organizer for the Gandhians and as a Vedic interpreter and yoga teacher. Eventually, she organizes the women of Kanthapura as the Sevis into a sevika sangh, who lead nonviolent resistance marches, a role that results in her being beaten and imprisoned. She too is uprooted at the end of the novel to find a new home and redefined identity in Kashipur.

Kamamma

She is Rangamma's traditionalist sister. A strict adherent to the Vedic caste system, she rejects Rangamma's conversion to Gandhi's teachings and her own daughter Ratna's modern behaviour and attitude. Kamamma embodies the larger conflict within the village through her divisive stance within the family, being far more concerned with Ratna's eligibility for remarriage than with her daughter's role in the swaraj movement.

Ratna

She is the fifteen-year-old widowed daughter of Kamamma. Thoroughly modern in her behavior of speaking her mind and walking alone in the village, the educated, attractive niece of Rangamma follows her aunt's example by joining the resistance movement. She breaks tradition by assisting Rangamma in the teaching of the Vedic texts as justification for Gandhi's views, suffers beatings in the protest marches, and is nearly raped by a policeman. When Rangamma is imprisoned, Ratna assumes leadership of the Sevis and, eventually, also suffers imprisonment. After being released, she leaves Kanthapura to continue her activism in Bombay.

Ratna, like others in her age group in this novel represents the hope and idealism of the youth in their vision and ability to craft a new future for themselves. Not only are they ready to look up to elder leaders like Moorthy but they are also ready to contribute with ideas and efforts to a cause that they believe in.

Sankar

He is the twenty-six-year-old secretary of the Kavar Congress Party. If you recollect, Kavar Congress office is the place where Moorthy visits in the early part of the novel and gets his Gandhian literature from which is subsequently disseminated amongst the villagers. A saintly, ascetic widower with a young daughter, he is a lawyer of renowned integrity who embodies Gandhian ideals. He wears khadi, the homespun, symbolic cloth of resistance; eschews expensive status symbols such as the cars and fine Western-style suits that his colleagues acquire; insists on using and teaching Hindi as the nationalists' language; and renounces the use of tobacco and liquor. He contributes heavily to the Congress Party funds, and he teaches Rangamma the organizational skills of activism. When Bhatta

attempts to harvest the Gandhians' crops and auction their lands in retaliation for their refusal to pay taxes to him, Sankar organizes a massive resistance from other villages and Kavar to prevent Bhatta from succeeding in his punitive seizure of their properties.

Seenu

Seenu is one of the junior members of the newly formed Kanthapura Congress Committee. Rao probably intended him to be in teenage thereby implying the sway of the movements appeal to the young and the idealistic. He is introduced to us as an affectionate youngster who fetches Moorthy to his house when desired by his mother or accompanies Rangamma to the temple late in the evening when Moorthy has decided to fast.

Moving around Moorthy, Seenu is used to bring out a number of issues that Moorthy can otherwise only articulate through a sology. On the issue of fasting, for example, Seenu tells Moorthy that he should not try to be like Gandhi because Gandhi was not an ordinary mortal to which Moorthy's response is 'Never mind-let me try. I will not die of it, will I?'

In that state of fasting and hunger how is it that he could meditate so deeply thought Moorthy? Once again it is to Seenu that the answers are given. 'Thoughts seemed to ebb away to the darkened shores and leave the illumined consciousness to rise up into the back of the brain, he had explained to Seenu. Light seemed to rise far from the horizon...infuse itself through his toes and finger-tips and rise to the sun-centre of his heart.'

Seenu's role as an associate and an assistant in this small group is highlighted throughout the movement whether it is grieving with Rangamma over Moorthy's swooning, or leading the bhajan singing or lighting the oil lamps in the temple and taking around the camphor senses, it is difficult to visualize the completeness and unity of this small group without this young boy.

Achakka

She is an old and simple village woman who tells us the story of Kanthapura as a witness-narrator. Like the Greek Teresa's figure she knows the past, lives in the present and foresees the future. She has firsthand knowledge of the Satyagraha movement as she was herself a participant. Refer to the Narrative Technique in the themes section to figure out the methods and techniques with which she relates to her audience.

Achakka symbolizes the hopes and aspirations of not only the women but the entire generation of exploited people in Kanthapura. Gifted with insight, intelligence and a sense of practical wisdom, she can comprehend the real meaning of satyagraha in the lives of people who are otherwise caught in a host of daily problems and issues. It is perhaps this that makes her the most tolerant and progressive character in the novel. She does not object to Ratna's wearing of bangles or colours and accepts the fact that Ratna is romantically attached to

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Moorthy. She is neither harsh nor censorious towards Puttamma or waterfall Venkamma. It is not that she always speaks in myths and digressive comparisons. She can be very simple and straightforward when she has to state the facts:

Notice her descriptions of Bade Khan being given a hint by Mr. Skeffington:

Bade Khan went straight to the Skeffington Coffee Estate and he said, 'Your Excellency, a house to live in?' And Mr. Skeffington turned to his butler and said, 'Give him a hut,' and the butler went to the Maistris' quarters and opened a tin shed.

As a woman, Achakka represents the fundamental force of both social and cultural change within *Kanthapura* and India is general. Her life becomes a representation of how Indians at that time were torn between accepting reality as it was or remaking it as it should be. She is also representative of how women despite being caught in traditions can embrace change and be an active agent of reconstructing reality.

Although she is an old woman, sustaining a family of sons and grandchildren (one of them is Seenu) she seems ageless in her strength and charity. The strength of her personality derives from her physical and mental vigour which impress her to study the Vedic texts and yoga along with Rangamma. A full-blooded political activist, she participates in the non-cooperation movement and pickets tobacco and liquor shops during which she is beaten up. When her house is burned along with others in *Kanthapura* she goes to live in the nearby village of Kashipura.

Narrative Technique used in *Kanthapura*

Before discussing Rao's narrative technique in *Kanthapura* let us stop for a while to discuss what is meant by this phrase. In common terms it means the methods involved in telling a story. Different individuals and cultures use different techniques to tell the same story in order to score different points and achieve different effects. Changing the narrator and his/her style can, for example, change the meaning of a story. Imagine hearing a story about the first rains after the summers from a child and an old woman. You will obviously savour the burst of an enthusiastic and energetic outcry in the old woman as you will miss a calm and serene understanding of the cycle of seasons in the child. This is just to mark the beginning of the differences between the two.

Rao was facing a problem while writing this novel which tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: 'the telling has not been easy'. He had to 'convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own'. Adjustments had to be made at multiple levels. Only some of these will be discussed here:

- (a) The puranic narrative devices
- (b) Using an old woman as a narrator.
- (c) Use of myths, legends and symbols

Puranas are a set of ancient texts among the Hindu religions scripture that eulogize various deities through divine stories employing a rich variety of narrative devices. Keeping in tune with this style Rao builds a narration that is robust in its main trunk even while being rich in its branching. The rich digressions from the main narrative serve to underline important issues engage with them.

The use of metaphors is perfectly in tune with the tone and content of the novel. Moorthy invites Jayaramachar to conduct Hari-Katha sessions at Kanthapura and it is Jayaramachar who speaks to the illiterate villagers through metaphors: As he Jayaramachar talks of Damyanthi and Shakuntala and Yashoda, he must say something about India and something about Swaraj. The subtlety of Gandhian thought and the complex situation of Pre-independence India could be explained to the villagers only through legends and religious stories of Gods.

Myths are an integral part of Indian village folklore and perhaps that is what accounts for its ability to communicate to the masses. Every village in India is replete with its own myths and its special place in the myths writes Rao:

‘There is no village in India...that has not a rich “Sthala Purana” or legendary history of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by this village— Ram might have rested under this Peepal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself on one of his pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut.’

The myth of the descent of Kanchanma from heaven to kill the demon is puranic but when the narrator links it to the colour of a specific hill near Kanthapura, legend and Purana mix together to make a Sthala Purana. Jayaramachar gives Gandhi the status of a God as he is first identified with Ram for killing the demon Ravana (The Red Man) and then with Krishna, killing Kaliya (The poisonous British Government). Gandhi’s emergence in Indian politics is linked to Krishna’s prophetic cry wherever there is decay of righteousness I shall come. Gandhi’s visit to England for the Second Round Table Conference is presented there:

Or simply reflect the narrator’s mind frame where a set of completely discordant thoughts may come up not linked overtly but through a complex chain in the narrator’s mind.

The narrator is undertaken with the breathless garrulity of a puranic tale. Simple words flow continuously, effortlessly and simply from the narrator’s mouth as if what was going on was a simple conversation. Rao says in the preface that the story is told in the oral tradition without any break: ‘episode follows episode and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops and it moves on to another thought. This was and still is ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.’ The western method of chapter decision is not followed and the narrator talks to the reader as if it was one continuous tale:

‘Our village- I don’t think you have heard about it- Kanthapura is its name and it is in the province of Kara.’

Achakka, the narrator uses the language typical of old women, expressing her feelings without any inhibition: ‘If rain comes not, you fall at her feet and say,

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Kenchamma, goddess, you are not kind to us. Our fields are full of Younglings and you have given us no water.’

Yet another relation between Rao’s narrative style and the Puranas is the extensive use of religious myths, legends, symbols and metaphors.

‘They say that Mahatma will go to Redman’s country...he will get us Swarajya... come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of air.’

The use of such myths and legends is also linked to the use of the old woman Achakka as the narrator and her illiterate audience. A villager born and brought up in the Indian tradition understands easily a contemporary problem if it is explained through a myth of that tradition. It was easier for the old woman to explain the subtleties and complexities of the Indian nationalist movement through the legends and myths. The entire freedom struggle becomes the Derfa’s campaign against the Azim’s in which Gandhi becomes a veritable god symbol! The strength to fight the British can now be tapped from religious faith and it is through religious appeal that the villagers can join the Satyagrahis. Temples are used to recruit workers for the Congress, vows of ahimsa, love and truth are taken in the temple sanctum and Moorthy, Gandhi and Kanchamma merge into one.

It is in this context that they interpret the destruction of Kanthapura towards the end of the novel. It is seen as symbolic of a new life emerging out of the dead one. Kashipura is the new phoenix that arises out of the ashes of the dead Kanthapura. This is also like the end of *Kalyug* with *Pralay* engulfing the whole village. Range Gowda goes to Kanthapura to find it completely deserted. This is like a new *Yuga* emerging from an old one—a trumpet call for change heard by Range Gowda who responds to it with a heart ‘beat[ing] like a drum’.

Major Themes in *Kanthapura*

The major themes of this novel has been discussed below:

Gandhi in Kanthapura

Around the beginning of the twentieth century emerged an Indian leader who taught the people belonging to different class, caste, language and religion how to unite to gain freedom. He stripped them of their cultural baggage which formed their divisive identities and taught them to see each other only as humans. It was a strange war where non-violence and love for enemy was prerequisite. Before taking on external enemy he wanted people to eliminate the enemy inside themselves. He stormed the ancient bastion of untouchability which had colonized a large section of the Indian society. People across the country were following his directions as if enchanted by him and the entire social and cultural order was undergoing a huge churning. Raja Rao was a committed follower of the man who was causing these cataclysmic changes in the Indian society. He perceived Gandhi as an idealistic leader but acknowledged his profound influence on the individual and society.

Rao captures Kanthapura when as it is sucked into the vortex of the freedom struggle which in its initial phase was mostly an urban phenomenon located most intensely in the cities where the leaders operated. Although colonial exploitation is evident in Kanthapura, none seems to be aware of its implications. It is an archetypal Indian village which is lost in a web of age old traditions, conventions and orthodoxies. They worship nature and natural forces and any event is seen as manifestation of will of village deity Kenchamma.

Rao remarks in his preface that there is no Indian village that doesn't have a *sthala purana* or legendary history of its own. Rao respects that living tradition and presents it as a reality of Indian villages. This immersion in tradition is its past. As time progresses we find Gandhi entering the mythical framework and according to Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the *shala purana* turns into a 'Gandhi purana'. Gandhi is represented as an incarnation whose purpose is to liberate India from clutches of evil.

In early parts of novel we find Gandhi's tale interspersed with harikatha. Jayramchar equates swaraj with Siva. 'Siva is three eyed and swaraj too is three eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, khaddar.' He manages to bring in swaraj into every topic of discussion. One day he decides to narrate the harikatha of birth of Gandhiji putting him on same pedestal as with Siva, Krishna and other celestial beings.

The entire episode throws light on close nexus between religion and politics discussed elsewhere. Moorthy uses the villagers' religious devotion to turn their attention towards contemporary politics. He uses religious idiom to convey his message. Rather than jolting them rudely out of their religiously drugged state and presenting stark reality he dexterously maneuvers their religious sentiments. He uses the immense power of faith which has acted as a cornerstone of their existence and replaced god and religion with Gandhi and adherence to swaraj respectively.

Moorthy is the central character who invites Jayaramachar and leads the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. He has read Gandhi and has undertaken the mission to spread his teaching and practices. He was in complete awe of the great being and his body showed signs of it. He felt like losing his identity and dissolving into a greater stream. It was a magical moment which made him realize the futility of his life until then. He understood the essence of his teaching and followed them with conviction. He gave up his education, changed sartorial preferences and decided not to marry.

He is an agent of Gandhi who works as per the directions of the Mahatma. He ensured the presence of women in harikathas and sought their contribution as well. Gandhi had firm faith in their abilities and worked for their emancipation. Jayramchar too in his subtle manner narrates the stories of Damyanti, Shakuntla and Yashoda the three legendary women famous for their exemplary courage. Gandhi sought to motivate them to display courage in the fight for swaraj.

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Slowly the seeds of swaraj begin to germinate in Kanthapura. Moorthy then proceeds to eradicate the evil of untouchability. It was Gandhi's biggest challenge to manage and eradicate untouchability and uplift the condition of the untouchables. Centuries of caste practice had rigidified the people's outlook and it was an uphill task to achieve caste equality. It was only by improving their condition that they could be made to participate in India's struggle for independence. Gandhi needed each and every individual to contribute in the struggle and saw a tremendous untapped political potential lying dormant in the women and members of the lower caste.

Moorthy understands the dual reasons for this upliftment and struggles hard against the social inertia which provided formidable resistance to change. Rao here shows how freedom struggle had to face internal resistance as well. Venkamma and Bhatta symbolize orthodox forces which feared losing their privileged status. They tried their best to deter Moorthy by sneers, jibes, social ostracism and even excommunication. But Moorthy perseveres in his decision of mixing with the lower caste. During the process he grows distant from his mother who couldn't bear his son's ways. Tension between mother and son grows and later she succumbs to it. This is the beginning of an upheaval in Kanthapura which was to face complete destruction.

Under the leadership of Moorthy, several young activists distributed books and charkha to everyone. The Non-cooperation movement was by now in its full sway and Gandhi stressed on swarajya and self-reliance. However, young activists had to face the ire of the traditionally minded upper classes. Brahmins were livid as they were asked to do what was the job of a lower caste weaver. But Moorthy succeeded in convincing Nanjamma and the rest agreed too.

Skeffington coffee estate is a centre of exploitation of the native coolies. Not only are they paid less after exacting hours of work they are treated inhumanly. The new master forced them to submit their women to his lust. He was accused of murdering a Brahmin who refused to yield his woman but walked out free. Moorthy is invited to the estate to teach them. Fearing his reputation and popularity among the masses, Bade Khan doesn't let him enter the estate. It triggers pent up humiliation and anger in coolies who despite Moorthy's pleas to shun violence beat up the policeman.

Moorthy is gravely disappointed and announces three day fast as penance. This period of self-contemplation reveals him metaphysical truths. He emerges as more tolerant and loving. He forgives Venkamma's jibes. He learns to control his desires and emotions. He is ashamed when he recollects his earlier feelings for Rachanna. More and more people came to see him and revere him as it was an incredible feat. Moorthy's fast induces guilt in others and they decide to cast out violence from their lives too. Their devotion for him is shown at his arrest. It is a dramatic scene where people of all caste are assembled standing next to each other to prevent his arrest. They peacefully resist and don't hit back. They court

arrests and face police brutalities but stay non-violent. They later stage various marches and picketing of liquor shops in a non-violent way.

Gandhism however encounters a crisis at the end of the novel. Police atrocities, seizure of land and a survival crisis force the Gandhians of Kanthapura out and they ultimately find refuge in Kashipura. Gandhi's ideals may be very appealing but they are found impractical as they do not address issues of hunger, thirst, security and brute survival until the time when Gandhian politics has overturned the exploitative system. As a mode of resistance Gandhian philosophy, as you will see in the decolonization section is found wanting in the face of the brute forces of colonization. If poor people must live while struggling, grow their food and tend their families while they are struggling politically, Gandhian thought must change and incorporate a different tactic.

Religion as Politics

In his autobiographical account, Gandhi observed that 'those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is'. That there is a clear link between the two and that one can serve the other is something that has been proven in human history repeatedly. However, the nature of the link is complex and can take a myriad forms, each specific to the context in which the interaction between the two actually takes place. Gandhi was deeply aware of this fact and transformed this into a political strategy. Two strands of this linkage are however clear in *Kanthapura*. Religion provides the physical location in which political meetings, fasting, speeches and protests can take place is obviously the first. Religion also provides the vocabulary and the truths in terms of which the issues and truths of the freedom movement can be explained to the common illiterate villager and their role in taking the movement further can be explained to them. Shahid Amin in his essay *Gandhi as Mahatma* (1988) discusses how Hindi journalism played an immensely significant role in the upheaval of the nationalist sentiment in Gorakhpur post 1919.

'In April of that year two important papers—the weekly *Swadesh* and the monthly *Kavi*—made their appearance. These, especially Dasrath Dwivedi's *Swadesh*, were to exercise an important influence in spreading the message of Gandhi over the region.'

Amin goes on to discuss how this influence in the district led to the idea of Gandhi to be appropriated by the peasants to validate their own means of addressing local problems, very much as depicted in *Kanthapura*.

Such re-appropriation of Gandhian thought implied a radical redefinition of the role of religion as experienced in the day to day lives of the common people and the change was clearly experienced as a contested power struggle. However, the fact that the temple becomes the site of the conflict indicates that in the realm of religion, the larger and deeper political goals have to be negotiated because they can reach state politics.

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In *Kanthapura*, the temple begins as a place of strict traditionalism. As Moorthy attempts to propagate social change by meeting the people of the Pariah caste, the village religious leader declares that he will outcast every Brahmin who follows Moorthy's example and mixes with the Pariahs. When Moorthy attempts to talk about Gandhi in the Brahmin temple, a village woman is outraged. Her son, 'who too has been to the city', says, 'but, Mother, [Gandhi] is... a holy man'; to which the woman declares, 'Holy man or lover of a widow, what does it matter to me? When I go to the temple I want to hear about Rama and Krishna... and not all this city-nonsense'. The Gandhian ideals of social change are initially unwelcome in a village deeply rooted in tradition.

Critic Meeta Chatterjee provides more understanding of the context of Gandhi and the changes he promoted. 'The erosion of hierarchy, the breakdown of 'caste pollution' rules and the disregard for the occupational stratification of the caste system is a threat that Gandhi's ideology in general posed.' As a Gandhian representative promoting Gandhian ideals in the village, it is Moorthy who poses the direct threat to the tradition and hierarchy of *Kanthapura*. Moorthy is both a physical and metaphorical representative of the modern ideological change which is battling the deep seated traditions.

Two crucial events illustrate the change: a three-day period which Moorthy spends in the temple fasting, and a violent clash between villagers and English law enforcement in which the village women take refuge in the temple. The first event—Moorthy's three-day fast in the temple—is the first time in the novel that external politics enters the internal space of the religious building.

The ideological and physical invasion, however, does not occur without confrontation. As Moorthy fasts and meditates in the temple, a village woman 'roused him with her loud laughter: "Ah, the cat has begun to take to asceticism... As though it were not enough to have polluted our village with your pariahs! Now you want to pollute us with your gilded purity!"'. The insults are not the only rebukes Moorthy receives. Another woman 'laughed and mocked at Moorthy'; a village leader, 'furious that Moorthy was pretending to be pious... insulted him and [swore] he would... denounce [his] conversion'. As Chatterjee explains, 'The internal confrontation between high caste Hindus who want to preserve their status, and Moorthy is a power struggle.' Through Moorthy, then, modernization directly challenges the traditionalism of the village. The location of the temple as a battlefield makes the confrontation a metaphor for all social activism in India that opposes a religious tradition.

The conflict determining the future of the temple—whether it will maintain its rigid traditionalism or succumb to the modern activism Moorthy brings into it—is not settled until several days after Moorthy's three-day fast. Because of Moorthy's unwavering love towards the villagers, the people decide that he 'is grown-up and great, and he has wisdom in him'. He then gives a speech declaring his social and political intentions. Previously, villagers were vehemently opposed. After Moorthy's

speech, they respond, 'He will be our Mahatma'. The binary opposition between orthodox and modern is settled decidedly in favour of the modern.

The second crucial event of *Kanthapura* that occurs in the temple demonstrates the drastic ideological and physical transformation of the temple. During one of the villagers' final political marches, violence erupts between demonstrators and authorities. Many of the village women take refuge in the temple. Outside the temple, an opposition policeman seals the door closed, trapping the women inside. The narrator, Achakka, recounts: '[W]e cry out hoarse behind the door, and we cry and moan and beg and weep and bang and kick and lament, but there's no answer...and...as the afternoon drew on, our stomachs began to beat like drums and our tongues became dry'. The women suffer through the rest of the day and all through the night. The next morning a Pariah woman steals a key to the temple and '[rushes] up to the temple to unlock it'. How drastically the village has changed is illustrated when a pariah frees them from the temple that in former times she would not have even been allowed to enter. A lower-caste woman as a savior to the Brahmin women demonstrates the complete revision of the local social standard. In the beginning of the novel, a Pariah woman would have been scorned and rebuked for even nearing the temple; at the end, she has saved the women from the very temple they would have earlier denied her.

Notably, the entrapment of the women in the temple also makes visible the deficiency of the temple as a physical protectorate. It is as a realm of ideas that the temple is significant and not as a physical fortress. The women enter the temple seeking refuge, but the immediate threat of starvation is presented. The temple can only offer temporary physical shelter but not any long term protection from the British. It is in what goes on inside the temple, namely the politico-spiritual discourses that political protection lies.

Decolonization in *Kanthapura*

Frantz Fanon is a renowned postcolonial thinker known for his two seminal works *Black Skin and White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1991). One of the issues Fanon's explorations center around and return to often is how ill equipped are the former colonies to function as independent nations and offers a critique of present day bourgeois nationalism that operates in third world nations after the departure of the European powers.

Fanon views decolonization as a violent phenomenon replacing one set of political values by another and the two having a clear oppositional relationship with each other. It executes the strategy in which, 'The last shall be the first and first last'. The settler inaugurates and perpetuates his illicit statute on the colony with violence through the police and the army. It is to be noted that the famous Battle of Plassey (1757) laid the foundation stone of British dominion in India followed by numerous local rebellions like the Maratha war, the Chauri-Chaura incident and the tribal movements of Jharkhand, each marked by the same bloodshed.

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Fanon's argument is that the violent trait of decolonization is a natural corollary of its predecessor, imperialism. In order to reverse the multi-faceted violence that colonization inflicts upon its target culture, a corresponding violence of reversal is necessary. Violence here is to be read as occurring at all levels - physical, rhetorical, emotional, socio-cultural etc. In this Fanon is different, even opposed to Gandhi who saw *ahimsa* or non-violence as one of the pre-requisites to decolonization. Moorthy's negotiation with all the villagers, specially the upper-caste ones, the villagers' negotiation with each other, Bade Khan, the police man's negotiation with the villagers and the changes that occur in the minds of the villagers, each of these instances is an example of the kind of violence Fanon speaks of here.

The struggle in *Kanthapura* is thus one of de-colonization. Fanon sees a critical role for the native intellectuals as agents of decolonization. Despite his western education, the native intellectual will sympathize as well as empathize with his countrymen and slowly but surely he will lead the mass mobilization against the colonial regime. In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy is the native intellectual who succeeds in that endeavour. He is the educated Brahmin youth who joins the hands of men and women, Brahmins and pariahs, and potters and coolies of the village against British dominion. He intimates all the village men on the deterioration of the native economy and exhorts them to foster indigenous goods. Other educated youth like Seenu, read Gandhiji's *Story of My Experiments with Truth* to his illiterate village men and Ratna transcends the stigma and limitations of her widowhood to enlighten the women folk.

The people of *Kanthapura*, under the influence of Moorthy have crossed the first major hurdle towards decolonization. They have realized the need for new liberating ideas and if necessary taking recourse to violence, though Moorthy has taught them the lesson of non-violence. That the ideas reign supreme is evident in the fact that they are ready to overcome their prejudices and come together in their fight for the common cause of freedom. Indeed, 'The national unity is first the unity of a group, the disappearance of old quarrels and final liquidation of unspoken grievances', writes Fanon. All the Brahmins, pariahs, and even the lumpen proletariat of the Skeffington Coffee estate come under a single flag. The break-up of the colonial government is their one and only target to accomplish.

Fanon resurfaces in our analysis of *Kanthapura* through his analysis of how myths, tribal dances and occult practices of the natives abet their spirits and contribute to their cohesion for a common cause. The faith in Kenchamma, the presiding deity of the village is one such conviction joining the people of *Kanthapura*. In the place of tribal dances, the harikathas of Jayaramachar enliven their fight. Jayaramachar jumbles up Indian mythology with contemporary politics as swaraj is, like Lord Siva three-eyed; khaddar, self-purification and Hindu-Muslim unity. The camphor ceremonies and bhajans held during the Sankara Jayanthi, the Ganesh festival and the Krishnashtami are the Indian equivalents of Fanonian tribal affairs.

Fanon also speaks of decolonization as a positive and creative struggle which bind the natives together and inculcates in every native mind the vibrant

ideas of national destiny and collective history. If colonialism is a divide and rule policy, decolonization is its counter- a mass movement resisting parochial divisions in every form. The native believes a renewed and invigorating life will arise from the ashes of the colonizer's corpse.

Fanon's colleague, Aime Cesaire shows how colonization works by the perverse logic of denigrating the native culture and asserting the western culture as superior. Decolonization therefore will involve recovering the lost sense of pride in one's own native culture which is what we see happening in Kanthapura. On the individual level, the struggle will purge of the native's inferiority complex and reclaim his self-respect. In each moment of 'don't touch the government campaign,' reluctance to pay taxes and toddy picketing in Kanthapura one can perceive the self-esteem and vigour of the people.

The process of decolonization cannot function without facing violence from the colonizers, warns Fanon. In Kanthapura, there is a wave of arrests and police parade to engender panic among the innocent people. But as Fanon prophesied it fans the anti-colonial flames. At the zenith of the anti-colonial struggle, 'On every hill a government in miniature is formed and takes over power. Everywhere in the valleys and in the forests, in the jungles and in the villages we find a national authority. Each man and woman brings the nation to life by his or her action and is pledged to ensure its triumph in their locality'. This statement by Fanon can be applied word by word in the case of Kanthapura if one replaces hill by a village.

The colonizer's violence erupts in the Satyanarayan procession. The initial slogan of 'Satyanarayan ki Jai' later becomes 'Inquilab Zindabad' and they shout:

'Lift the flag high
O, Lift the flag high
Brothers, sisters, friends and mothers
This is the flag of Revolution.'

Soon, the volunteers and the police begin to wrestle each other. Some have brought gas cylinders, sickles and lathis to fight the police. '... Violence touched all sides (places, areas, et cetera) at all times, and all violence was equal, and the police and the soldiers were all equally violent, and the people were all equally victimized, but especially some of the girls.'

Rachi's act of blazing the village transforms the serene hamlet into a bloody pandemonium. Leaving their birth place the fortunate ones flee and settle in Kashipura. Fanon would trace the root cause for the failure of this struggle in the lack of proper guidance and adept organization—something native cultures are not adept in traditionally. The procession is only an inchoate affair executed in a hasty manner. When the British government intensifies its iron hand measures like confiscating their land, their spirit is dampen. Weary of the long drawn hardships they are dubious about the efficacy of Moorthy and his Gandhian ideology.

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When they are finally driven out of their household, the only means is a violent retort.

Towards the end of the novel, Moorthy expresses his disapproval of Gandhism and steps towards Nehruvian socialism in his letter to Ratna. Thus, Fanon's words, 'Non-violence is an attempt to settle the colonial system around a green baize table, before any regrettable act has been performed or irreparably gesture made, before any blood has been shed' holds true for the Kanthapura crusade also. The destruction and anarchy that disturbs Moorthy is a necessary part of the decolonization process. For decolonization in its attempt to re-territorialize the colonial cartography 'is obviously a programme of complete disorder'. However, it is only out of such disorder that a kind of new order can emerge, an order that is based on the formation of a new nation.

Decolonization and the emergence of nation are simultaneous processes. Chapter three of *The Wretched of the Earth* titled 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' describes the imminent dangers of independence in nascent nation states. All the parochial considerations began to reappear and eclipse the national consciousness. 'The nation is passed over for the race and the tribe is preferred to the state'. The spiritual penury of the native bourgeoisie accounts for this catastrophe. The new Kashipura will have to face the challenges and learn the necessities of egalitarian politics itself. A new state post decolonization must be born out of the dreams aspirations and efforts of its people. This is why the novel leaves Kashipura in state of evolution far from Moorthy's ideal conception of a village.

Women in Kanthapura

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is a subtle record of the immense changes that the Gandhian movement of the thirties brought into the life of the Indian woman and yet didn't let her cross the conventional *feminine* boundaries. The novel traces the material and psychological revolution that accompanied the emergence of the woman from within the twin incarnations of the *devi* and the *dasi* that has reigned the imagination of the patriarchy since ages. From the polar images of the all-pervading and all-powerful goddess Kenchamma and the Pariah Rachanna's wife who would spin only if her husband tells her to, emerge the new women who defy conventions and lead the war of independence — Rangamma and Ratna.

Political mass movements in any country, as Ania Loomba suggests, have dubious attitudes to the question of female agency and women's rights. It appears as if, much like patriarchal culture, political movements demand a particular role from the women and force her to change, adapt and perform in the name of ideals that on the surface may appear highly desirable but end up confining women in newer and different ways. Throughout Latin America, argues Loomba, *machismo* posed a real problem for the women in political struggle. Given the idealization of the *machismo* cult it was difficult if not impossible to visualize how a woman's contribution could be significant.

Some critics suggest that Gandhi's Non-cooperation movement was *feminist* in nature—it mobilized an unprecedented number of women and also, it adopted attributes such as passivity, and activities such as spinning, traditionally considered to be *feminine* in nature. This is debatable as the movement in its essence remained deeply conservative. It is true that the Gandhian movement had a considerable role to play in bringing the woman out of *purdah*. Women made up a significant part of the *satyagrahis* and many assumed the role of leaders in the movement. Thus we find the Gandhi of Kanthapura, Moorthy, selecting Rangamma as one of the members of the Congress Panchayat Committee.

But Gandhi's movement confined the women's public roles to being merely an extension of their domestic selves in concurrence with the patriarchal conceptions of the family and society. Despite the references to Rani Laxmibai in *Kanthapura*, the ideal woman is projected in the figure of the ever-obedient and eternally suffering Sita. As Loomba puts it, the woman's state was simply a transition 'from a traditional child bride into the nationalist ideal of the wife as help-mate and companion'.

We get a glimpse of this painful evolution in the autobiography of Ramabai Ranade, who was married at the age of eleven to the well-known scholar and jurist Mahadev Govind Ranade. Torn between her husband's persistence for her to be educated and the taunts of her mother-in-law and other female relatives, she decides on one occasion to be absent from a function at the temple where she had to choose between sitting with orthodox or reformist women. Her husband punished her by refusing to speak to her even when she performed the traditional rubbing of his feet with ghee, without even telling her what her fault was. The matter was only resolved when she went up to him and apologized. His response was:

'Who would like it if his own one didn't behave according to his will? Once you know the direction of my thoughts, you should always try to follow the same path so that neither of us suffers. Don't ever do such things again.'

We meet with similar resistance to the Sevika Sangha from the men in *Kanthapura*. As long as the male privileges and rights are not jeopardized, men in Kanthapura do not have any problems with their women being radicalized into politics. But the moment any of these men are asked to compromise on any of these rights or privileges the situation turns against the women:

'And when our men heard of this, they said: was there nothing left for our women but to vagabond about like soldiers? And every time the milk curdled or a dhoti was not dry, they would say, "And this is all because of this Sevi business".'

A woman is beaten as a consequence of being a part of this Sangha although she is seven months pregnant. Post office Satamma's husband forbids her to go to Rangamma's house and when accosted by the latter says, 'I am a Gandhi's man, aunt. But if I cannot have my meals as before, I am not a man to starve'. Rangamma in accordance to the Gandhian ideals tells Satamma not to fail in her timely services to her husband or home.

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Another point of dubious credibility relates to the education of women. Women's education has always been a sore point with the Indian patriarchy. Arguments for women's education in metropolitan as well as colonial contexts, according to Loomba, rely on the logic that educated women would make better wives and mothers. At the same time, they have to be taught to *remain in their places*. This idea is as current now as it was eighty years back. The widening up of one's world as a result of education fails to keep the woman shackled within the four walls of her home and it is precisely this spectre of the truly independent woman that haunts patriarchy.

The women leaders in *Kanthapura* are both educated widows, Rangamma and Ratna. Rangamma acts as a source of information, knowledge and inspiration to the village women. Apart from telling them about other galaxies on the one hand and the equal rights that women share with the men in a far-away country on the other, Rangamma is a regular subscriber to newspapers from the city. These papers supply the villagers with the latest developments in the revolutionary struggle in the other parts of the country and later as to the trial and judgment of Moorthy and his fellow *satyagrahis*. Rangamma is the one who tells the women about Laxmi Bai and trains them to resist the *lathi* blows of the police passively. She modulates the deep core religious zeal in the women and adds a nationalist dimension to it, '...we shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma.'

On the other end there is Ratna. Initially, she is detested by the village women along with the evil Bhatta, for walking about the streets like a boy, wearing her hair to the left 'like a concubine', and wearing her jewellery—and all this being a widow. Ratna's retort when accosted for this is remarkable,

'...when she was asked why she behaved as though she hadn't lost her husband, she said that that was nobody's business, and that if these sniffing old country hens thought that seeing a man for a day, and this when one is ten years of age, could be called a marriage, they had better eat mud and drown themselves in the river.'

We find innumerable examples of similarly suffering women in Bengali literature as well, but none perhaps daring to voice so vehement a protest. Her mother reacts to her attitude in the conventional fashion, calling her a wicked tongued creature and significantly, that she *ought never to have been sent to school*. Later, in the absence of Moorthy and Rangamma, it is Ratna who leads the women against the police as the latter launch a violent assault against the village.

Another great leap towards liberation is achieved by the women in the novel by their deciding to read and comment on the vedantic texts when Ramakrishnaya dies. The women choose Ratna to read the texts and Rangamma to comment on them, a remarkable decision when one considers the contemporary furore over whether a woman at all has the right to read the Vedas or not!

Rao's selection of an old grandmother as the narrator in *Kanthapura* is one of the finest stylistic devices of the novel. We witness the immense change that is gradually brought about in the psyche of the narrow-minded, prejudiced and uneducated widow as she mingles facts with fantasy to describe how the world changed for her and her companions under the influence of Moorthy's preaching and Rangamma's Sevika Sangha. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman's point of view as opposed to its analytical, power-structured male version that inevitably leaves the women folk out.

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Check Your Progress

3. How has Raja Rao described the population of Kanthapura?
4. How has Mahatma Gandhi been portrayed at the end of the Satyagraha?
5. Why has Moorthy been portrayed as a force of change in Kanthapura?
6. Who is Kamamma and what are her concerns?
7. What do you understand by Narrative Technique?
8. What problems did Raja Rao face while writing *Kanthapura*?
9. Name the two important texts on colonialism written by Frantz Fanon.
10. Who appoints Rangamma as the member of the Congress Panchayat Committee?

14.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, the serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope refers to reality.
2. Raja Rao lost his mother at a very young age. This left a lasting impression on the author, which may also be the reason why orphanhood is a recurring theme in his novels.
3. Raja Rao describes the people of Kanthapura to be poor, illiterate and backward. The village is ridden with three major ills: caste, class and toddy. Different quarters in it house people of different castes—the highest caste being Brahmins, the lowest, the Pariahs. But despite the ills, people from different castes and classes manage to live harmoniously accommodating peacefully the demands one makes on the other. People are also extremely religious-minded and at least among the lower classes Goddess Kenchamma is the presiding deity enshrined in the village temple.
4. At the end of the satyagraha, the people looked upon Gandhi as Lord Ram who would slay Ravana, the British and free Sita, their motherland.
5. Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age

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- old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.
6. Kamamma is Rangamma's traditionalist sister. A strict adherent to the Vedic caste system, she rejects Rangamma's conversion to Gandhi's teachings and her own daughter Ratna's modern behaviour and attitude. Kamamma embodies the larger conflict within the village through her divisive stance within the family, being far more concerned with Ratna's eligibility for remarriage than with her daughter's role in the swaraj movement.
 7. Narrative Technique means the methods involved in telling a story.
 8. Rao was facing a problem while writing *Kanthapura*. He tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: 'the telling has not been easy'. He had to 'convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own'.
 9. Frantz Fanon is a renowned postcolonial thinker known for his two seminal works *Black Skin and White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1991).
 10. Moorthy selected Rangamma as one of the members of the Congress Panchayat Committee.

14.5 SUMMARY

- Raja Rao is known to be one of the most respected and honoured Indian writer of English language novels and short stories. All his works are characterized by Hinduism. His novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) established Raja Rao as one of the finest Indian stylists. *The Serpent and the Rope* is a semi-autobiographical novel which refers to the seeking of spiritual consciousness in Europe and India.
- In 1988, Rao received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality. *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.
- The protagonist of the novel *Kanthapura* is a young Brahmin boy, named Moorthy. Moorthy was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Although he had never met Gandhi personally, he had read enough of his ideas and heard about his speeches to be influenced by his ideas and had even seen him once in a vision. What appealed to him in Gandhi's ideas was the quest for the realization of equality among all and based on this, the need to resist British occupation through non-violent protest.

- Moorthy lives with the Rangamma, a childless widow of the village. Rangamma was an educated lady and was a supporter of Moorthy, the freedom fighter. Moorthy was now on the religious, moral and political periphery of his society and it is from this periphery that he began his political struggle decisively.
- The Skeffington coffee estate was spread over a vast sprawling expanse in the neighbourhood of Kanthapura. The owner of the Estate, an Englishman, ruled the coolies with an iron hand, using their physical labour in an unrestricted way and freely using their womenfolk for sexual ends. It was a veritable slavery under a lone slave master and his system.
- Moorthy is conceived as a force of change. As a Gandhian, he is responsible for doing two things in the story. First, to make people conscious of the age old inequalities that they are mired in and link these inequalities to colonial oppression. His second role is to liberate the people from these inequalities so that they are automatically harnessed to the cause of the freedom struggle. He is characterized as the force that will cause both these changes.
- Rao was facing a problem while writing *Kanthapura* which tried to present a uniquely Indian reality in a foreign language, i.e., English. In the preface he observes: ‘the telling has not been easy’. He had to ‘convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own’.
- Gandhism encounters a crisis at the end of the novel. Police atrocities, seizure of land and a survival crisis force the Gandhians of Kanthapura out and they ultimately find refuge in Kashipura. Gandhi’s ideals may be very appealing but they are found impractical as they do not address issues of hunger, thirst, security and brute survival until the time when Gandhian politics has overturned the exploitative system.
- Gandhi’s movement confined the women’s public roles to being merely an extension of their domestic selves in concurrence with the patriarchal conceptions of the family and society. Despite the references to Rani Laxmibai in *Kanthapura*, the ideal woman is projected in the figure of the ever-obedient and eternally suffering Sita. As Loomba puts it, the woman’s state was simply a transition ‘from a traditional child bride into the nationalist ideal of the wife as help-mate and companion’.
- Rao’s selection of an old grandmother as the narrator in *Kanthapura* is one of the finest stylistic devices of the novel. We witness the immense change that is gradually brought about in the psyche of the narrow-minded, prejudiced and uneducated widow as she mingles facts with fantasy to describe how the world changed for her and her companions under the influence of Moorthy’s preaching and Rangamma’s *Sevika Sangha*. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman’s point of view as opposed to its analytical, power-structured male version that inevitably leaves the womenfolk out.

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14.6 KEY WORDS

- **Anthology:** It is a published collection of poems or other pieces of writing.
- **Gandhism:** It is a body of ideas and principles that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is particularly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance.
- **Swaraj:** It refers to the demand for self-government or independence for India.
- **Satyagraha:** It is a policy of passive political resistance, especially advocated by Mahatma Gandhi against British rule in India.

14.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Raja Rao's literary career.
2. Give a brief character sketch of Moorthy in *Kanthapura*.
3. What are the narrative techniques used by Raja Rao in the novel *Kanthapura*?
4. Briefly mention the depiction of Gandhian beliefs in the novel *Kanthapura*.

Long Answer Questions

1. Examine the major themes in Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*.
2. Analyse the role played by the major women characters in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*.
3. Discuss Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* as a post-colonial novel.

14.8 FURTHER READINGS

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