

# INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

M.A., ENGLISH

Semester – III, Paper-III

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# **M.A. ENGLISH - INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH**

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## **FOREWORD**

*Since its establishment in 1976, Acharya Nagarjuna University has been forging a head in the path of progress and dynamism, offering a variety of courses and research contributions. I am extremely happy that by gaining 'A' grade from the NAAC in the year 2016, Acharya Nagarjuna University is offering educational opportunities at the UG, PG levels apart from research degrees to students from over 443 affiliated colleges spread over the two districts of Guntur and Prakasam.*

*The University has also started the Centre for Distance Education in 2003-04 with the aim of taking higher education to the door step of all the sectors of the society. The centre will be a great help to those who cannot join in colleges, those who cannot afford the exorbitant fees as regular students, and even to housewives desirous of pursuing higher studies. Acharya Nagarjuna University has started offering B.A., and B.Com courses at the Degree level and M.A., M.Com., M.Sc., M.B.A., and L.L.M., courses at the PG level from the academic year 2003-2004 onwards.*

*To facilitate easier understanding by students studying through the distance mode, these self-instruction materials have been prepared by eminent and experienced teachers. The lessons have been drafted with great care and expertise in the stipulated time by these teachers. Constructive ideas and scholarly suggestions are welcome from students and teachers involved respectively. Such ideas will be incorporated for the greater efficacy of this distance mode of education. For clarification of doubts and feedback, weekly classes and contact classes will be arranged at the UG and PG levels respectively.*

*It is my aim that students getting higher education through the Centre for Distance Education should improve their qualification, have better employment opportunities and in turn be part of country's progress. It is my fond desire that in the years to come, the Centre for Distance Education will go from strength to strength in the form of new courses and by catering to larger number of people. My congratulations to all the Directors, Academic Coordinators, Editors and Lesson-writers of the Centre who have helped in these endeavors.*

***Prof. P. RajaSekhar***

*Vice-Chancellor*

*Acharya Nagarjuna University*

**Semester – III**  
**303EG21: INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH**  
**Paper-III**  
**SYLLABUS**

**UNIT – I**

Early Indo-Anglian poetry, Romantic poetry, Mysticism, The rise of the Indian Novel in English, Impact of Freedom Movement, post – Independence poetry, Indian drama in English, Novel of propaganda, Social realism, Myth and folklore, the Philosophical novel, the Psychological novel.

**UNIT – II**

Sarojini Naidu : The Temple

R. Parthasarathy (ed) : *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, Oxford University Press, India

The following poems:

a) Nissim Ezekiel : (i) “Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher”.  
(ii) “Enterprise”.

b) A.K. Ramanujan : (i) “Smallscale Reflections on a Great House”.  
(ii) “A River”.

c) R. Parthasarathy : “Home coming – Sections 1, 3 & 4.

**UNIT – III**

Ravindranath Tagore : Chitra

Girish Karnad : Hayavadana

**UNIT – IV**

Mulk Raj Anand : Coolie

R.K. Narayan : The Man-Eater of Malgudi.

Anita Desai : Fire on the Mountain

## UNIT – V

Raja Rao : Cow of the Barricades- Short Story.  
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : “Role of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in Bringing Untouchable on the  
the  
Political Horizon of India and Laying a Foundation of  
Indian Democracy”

### SUGGESTED READINGS:

1. From **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s Writings and Speeches Vol. 17 Part-I** (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Course Material Publication Committee Unit of Maharashtra 2003).
2. Swami Vivekananda : Chicago Lecture in the Parliament of Religions.

## CONTENTS

S.NO.	LESSON NAME	PAGES
1	Indian English Fiction – Background	1.1 – 1.9
2	Sarojini Naidu : <i>The Temple (Introduction)</i>	2.1 – 2.12
3	The Temple – (Advance Study of Sarojini Naidu)	3.1 – 3.12
4	Nissim Ezekiel – (i) Poet, Lover, Bird watcher (ii) Enterprise	4.1 – 4.11
5	Smallscale Reflections on a Great House - A.K.Ramanujan	5.1 – 5.7
6	A River – A.K.Ramanujan	6.1 – 6.8
7	Home Coming – R.Parthasarathy	7.1 - 7.12
8	Chitra – Ravindranath Tagore	8.1 – 8.10
9	Hayavadana – Girish Karnad	9.1 – 9.14
10	Coolie: A Novel by Mulk Raj Anand	10.1 – 10.6
11	The Man-Eater of Malgudi : A Novel by R.K. Narayan	11.1 – 11.11
12	Fire On The Mountain- I – Anita Desai	12.1 – 12.14
13	Fire On The Mountain-II – Anita Desai	13.1 – 13.6
14	The Cow of the Barricades – Raja Rao	14.1 – 14.9
15	Dr.B.R.Ambedkar - Nation and Democracy	15.1 – 15.9

# LESSON-1

## INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION - BACKGROUND

### OBJECTIVES

- To make a brief review of Indian English fiction from 1864 to 1984
- To examine the origin of Indian English novel and its different patterns, themes, and its development.
- To provide the readers the background knowledge to Indian English fiction.

### STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Indian Novel
- 1.3 The Indo-Anglian Novel
- 1.4 First Generation Novelists
- 1.5 Second Generation Novelists
- 1.6 Third Generation Novelists
- 1.7 Women Novelists
- 1.8 Summary
- 1.9 Sample Questions
- 1.10 Suggested Reading

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

A student of Indian English Literature may be baffled/confused with so many terms such as Indian Literature, Anglo-Indian Literature, Indo-Anglian Literature and Indian English Literature. So let us try to discuss these terms in brief.

**A. Indian Literature:** India has a rich literary heritage from times immemorial starting from Vedas till today. Many versatile writers enriched Indian literature through different languages pertaining to India. Indian literature means different literatures produced in different languages of India such as Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, etc. Indian English literature is also one among them. The impact of the British rule in India has caused the rise of Indian English Literature.

**B. Anglo-Indian Literature:** Anglo-Indian Literature means the works contributed by English men, on Indian themes. For example, the works of Sir William Jones, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.W. Bain, E.M.Forster, Rudyard, Kipling, Pearl S. Buck and so on.

**C. Indi-Anglian Literature:** This refers to literature originally written by Indians who use English as a natural medium of expression. This term excludes the writings of Edwin Arnold,

Forster, Kipling and others, though written on Indian themes. It was Prof. Iyengar who gave currency and respectability to the term.

**D. Indo-English Literature:** This term is used by V.K. Gokak to refer to English translations from Indian languages. For a long time referred to as Indo-Anglian Literature or less often Indian English Literature, now Indian Writing in English is the preferred term for the creative writing in English by Indians. Dr. C.R. Reddy feels that Indo-Anglian Literature is not essentially different from Indian Literature. After this brief explanation of these terms, let us examine the growth of Indian English novel.

## 1.2 THE INDIAN NOVEL

The novel is a new literary phenomenon added to the world of literary works such as dramas, short stories, poems and fables. The novel is the agreeable form for embodying ideas and experiences of the novelist. It is the most popular form of literature. Political anxiety was the main ingredient of Indian writing in English published between 1930-1940.s. Post independence literature is mainly based on the problems of mankind, traditions, problems of individuals and families, conflict between haves and havenots, spiritual faith, and materialistic realities.

### **Bengali Novel: Translation:**

Rajmohan.s Wife (1864) was the first novel in English, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The English versions of Durgeshnandini, Kapalakundala. Vishavruksha. (The poison tree; A Tale of Hindu life in Bengal) and Anandmath, novels appeared between 1864 and 1866. They are novels of historical importance. These novels are written in .Bengali. and later translated into English language. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a novelist of historical and romantic fiction, has been hailed as a Rishi, and path-maker. Prophecy was his best gift as a novelist. His song .Bandemataram. inspired all Indians and converted them into a religion of patriotism. His purpose was to restore the self-respect of the people of India. Another famous Bengali novelist Rabindranath Tagore, the celebrated novelist aimed at bridging the gap between the East and the West. Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that the flowering of Bengali literature is the result of their exposure to the western thought and culture. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1935) has outgrown both Bankim and Tagore in portraying characters in his novels like *Srikanta*, *Devadas*, *Pather Dabi*, *Bipradas* and *Seshprasna*. Closely trailing behind these celebrated novelists are Tarasankar Bandyopadhyaya, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya, Manik Bandyopadhyaya, Naini Bhaumik, Gajandrakumar Mitra and Manoj Basu who made their literary pursuits both in English and Bengali. The vicissitudes of the Bengali novel foreshadow more or less the vicissitudes of the Novel in India. The Western breeze blows, sometimes directly and sometimes and more significantly-indirectly, its velocity chastened in the ample spaces of Bengal. -Dr. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar - *Indian Writing in English*- p.319

### **TAGORE:**

It is with Tagore's works that the political novel gained popularity in the context of the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century, Raibindranath Tagore is the one who created literary history. The Nobel Prize for literature to Tagore marks the beginning of recognition on



a global scale for the literary talents of Indians. As a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, reformer and philosopher, he achieved a great reputation. The novels and the short stories of Tagore are unquestionably distinctive and distinguished in nature. His full length novels which are appeared in English are *The Wreck*, *The Home and the World* and *Gora*. *Gora* is undoubtedly the best of his fiction. Krishna Kripalani described it as 'the epic of India in transition at the most crucially intellectual period of modern history.'

### 1.3 THE INDO-ANGLIAN NOVEL

Indian English novel has followed the foot-steps of the Bengali Novel. The development of the Indian English novel seems to follow certain definite patterns and consists of well defined stages. Ever since the appearance of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864 Indian English fiction has grown considerably in bulk, variety and maturity. Its development can be traced from imitative to realistic; sociological to psychological stage. After the First World War, the Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealised. The novelists made deliberate efforts to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes, portraying India as she really was. The novels written between the two World Wars were primarily concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian ethos. It was during this period that the Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such as the ordeal of the freedom-struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables and the poor. The nationalists effectively utilised the form of novel as a convenient means of popularizing and disseminating their cause and ideas. After the Independence of India, we can observe a shift in the themes of the Indian English novelists. Their interest moved from the nationalistic zeal to the private sphere. They began to delineate in their works, 'The individual's quest for the self, in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crisis. Most of the second-generation novelists in their eagerness to find new themes, have renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man. For example the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, and Arun Joshi. Their main intention is 'Man but not Society.'. In the earlier generation Indian English Novelists, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand (The famous Trio) played an important role in the development of Indian English novel. They got name fame and international recognition to the form of Indian English novel. Though they belong to the same period and began their career as writers in the 1930.s, their paths of writing are different. Mulk Raj Anand is a champion of down-trodden people. He portrays the problems of the lower classes of the society. R.K. Narayan is a detached observer of life. He never meddles with the troubles and problems of the society. He presents the realistic middle class man and his problems and feelings. Raja Rao represents the traditional everlasting values of spiritual India in his writings. Let us know more about them.

### 1.4 FIRST GENERATION NOVELISTS

The famous three names are Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayana and Raja Rao. Mulk Raj Anand, who inherited the army man's dare devilry, adventure from his father has also imbibed humanism. He is the first humanist and realistic novelist. Before Anand, according to Iyengar, 'None of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction after the manner of Balzac or Zola.'. He always chose outcastes, peasants, sepoys, common people and their sufferings. His novels, *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* are some of the dynamic packed novels.

The characters in these novels are of no significance to the rich and sophisticated but Anand makes the readers feel their presence and share their failures and sorrows. Anand is Dickensian in his sensitivity to the existence of social evils in the society. He tries to create in the readers an awareness of the dehumanising social evils and to stir their feelings and activate them for the removal of their evils. Anand rejects all institutions in favour of man. He is a core humanist. That is why he repeats in his novels: 'I believe in Man'. The protagonists in Anand's novels belong to the class of suffering. Anand takes care to look into the emotional and psychological problems of these human beings. Religion has no sacred place in his novels. He exposed the exploitative nature of religion in his novels. His aim is to reject exploitation of any kind in all its facets. His object is not merely to shock his readers by a representation of reality but to stimulate their consciousness. He has evocatively presented different layers of human experience in his fiction. He has exposed social evils in their myriad manifestations. Among his works, *Coolie* and *Untouchable* are regarded as his master pieces. In *Coolie*, the protagonist Munoo, an orphan boy from Kangra hills, sets out in search of a livelihood. Munoo works as a labourer in different places where he is exposed to the hard realities of the world. The sufferings of the hero, Munoo through life and death indirectly universalises the social evils like class conflict and communal riots etc. In *Untouchable*, the protagonist Bakha gets the full impact of caste cruelty on his adolescent mind. Anand writes in his preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud* that 'He had ventured into the territory that had been largely ignored till then by Indian writers.. The boyhood, youth and early manhood of Lalu Singh, a Sikh farmer's son formed the themes of his three novels *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*. The vitality of his characters, the richness of his total comprehension, and his well planned narrations project Anand as a Naturalistic novelist. The facet of his humanism can be observed in all his novels. His close association with the down-trodden and his passionate record of their woes proved him as a champion of the under-dog.

### **R.K. NARAYAN:**

R.K. Narayan, another celebrated novelist from South India, was portrayed as 'The Man of Malgudi'. His sense of humour mixed with his ability to discuss precisely the social constraints existing in south India makes him the most popular novelist among the first generation novelists of Pre- Independent India. Chaman Nahal another novelist analyses like this:

*Narayan's charm lies elsewhere. It is in his deep sense of humour, the ability of his characters to laugh at themselves, his grip of the mundane and comic side of life that he rises to the best of his abilities.*

R.K. Narayan is fundamentally a good story teller with an eye for the ludicrous aspect of life. His portrayal of characters has a touch of realism. In his novels, R.K. Narayan deals in trivial things, day to day occurrences and little themes. The eminence of R.K. Narayan as an artist resides in his sound management of the narrative. R.K. Narayan's first publication was *Swami and His Friends*; *Bachelor of Arts* and *The Dark Room* appeared in succession. His other novels published at the end of the war are *The English Teacher*, *the Financial Expert* and *Waiting for The Mahatma*. During his American tour organized by the Rockefeller Foundation, he could add *The Guide* and *My Dateless Dairy*. *Swami and His Friends* is the

most enjoyable novel, which deals with the actual happenings of everyday in the lives of many boys whom Swami represents. In *Bachelor of Arts* one can see the hurdles caused to lovers by rigid caste controls and difficult astrological hurdles. *Dark Room* is a novel depicting a study of domestic incompatibility. *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a novel, which keeps Mahatma Gandhi in the background and makes his presence felt. *The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert and The Sweet Vendor* - all these novels take the readers into an exotic world of half-hearted dreamers, artists, financiers, speculators, eccentrics, film stars and sanyasis. R.K. Narayan is a detached observer of life. There are no moral preachings in his novels. Among his many works, *The Guide* occupies an important place. In this novel R.K. Narayan's maturity gets mellowed to its zenith. The ending of the novel *The Guide* is beautiful and artistic. In his other novel, *The English Teacher* we feel the touch of autobiographical details of his life, but the ending of the novel is a sort of anti-climax. In Narayan's latest novels one could conceive the idea of a galloping hero of the sickened modern life.

### RAJA RAO:

Raja Rao is another contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. Mahatma Gandhi's influence engulfed him also during his childhood. As a novelist he revealed in his works a sensitive awareness to the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution. The pulls and pushes of the past traditions were also visibly evident in his literary works. His first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is a versatile description of Gandhian myth, a poetic translation of the realities of life. The central character, a Brahmin widow symbolizes women of limited range of intelligence agreeable to change and adopt new ideas. Raja Rao in his characteristic style created characters who are instruments of karma, Jnana and Bhakti. His characterisation is excellent. His second novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is another classic novel. His third novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* appeared in 1965 followed by *The Chessmaster* and his *Moues* (1988). His total output amounts to a little over 1000 pages, but he has placed the Indian-English novel on the world map and achieved international fame. *The Serpent and the Rope* is his finest evocation, which continues to fascinate many novelists, from all over the world. The novel recounts the life of a person brought up in the traditional Brahminical milieu. The novel is written in the autobiographical mode. It explains the spiritual journey of a South Indian Brahmin, Rama Swamy, the principal protagonist. In his evolution as a novelist he has moved from simple narration *Kanthapura* to Metaphysical speculations in his later novels (*The Serpent and the Rope*). His later novels are philosophical and show his intellectual and artistic maturity. He is the pioneer of the metaphysical novel. *The Serpent and the Rope* has to be read and re-read and every fresh reading reveals new beauties and philosophical truths.

### 1.5 SECOND GENERATION NOVELISTS

Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Shagal, Balachandra Rajan, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai are considered to be the prominent novelists of the second generation who appeared on the scene in the 50.s and 60.s. Bhabani Bhattacharya, a free lance writer, wrote five novels namely *So Many Hungers, Music for Mohini, He Who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold and Shadow from Ladakh*. Most of his writings are vivid descriptions of the sufferings of the poor, an impeachment of man's inhuman behaviour towards fellow human beings. *Shadow from Ladakh*, a novel written during

China's invasion of India, can be considered as a shadow play cast by the China's invasion. The whole novel is a grandeur in conflict. Conflict between marching forward for a change and looking back to respect the old traditions. Manohar Malgonkar published four novels in the course of five years. His first novel *Distant Drums* is an attempt to present the life of army during the transitional period between the last part of the British regime and the first years of Congress rule. *Combat of Shadows* published in 1962, is based on the love affairs of Henry Winton, Ruby and Jean. Like Mulk Raj Anand, Malgonkar also chose Assam Tea Gardens and many conflicting forces like Tea pythons, love, passion and sportsmanship. *A Bend in the Ganges* published in 1964 gives an account of the sequential events starting with the ceremonial burning of foreign cloth and ends with the burning of the Indian cities due to the clash between the Hindus and Muslims. Khushwant Singh's two novels bring into light the Partition of India. His *Train to Pakistan* projects with the pitiless precision, a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August, 1947. *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* concentrates on the inner tensions and external movements of a well-to-do Sikh family in Punjab during the period of .Quit India. movement. Arun Joshi came into limelight with the publication of his very first novel, **The Foreigner (1968)**. Joshi's primary concern in his five novels is the predicament of modern man and his attempt to understand the labyrinths of life. His protagonists do not end their journey in futile efforts. They arrive at some meaning of life. His fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. The source of most of Joshi's novels is actual experience of individuals. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament, particularly in the light of motives responsible for his actions and reactions on his psyche. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, two modern novelists of India, examined the theme of the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms in their novels. Balachandra Ranjan's *The Dark Dancer* is about analysing the factors leading to the Partition and its subsequent tragedy. The protagonist blames the British rulers for the Partition and says to Cynthia with contempt: .You made this awful thing grow for a whole generation. You British have started up the trouble. It is you that made the religious divisions take priority over our common political interests. *Azadi* is another novel published in 1976 by Chaman Nahal. This novel depicts political, religious, social, cultural and historical events that took place during the Partition.

### 1.6 THIRD GENERATION NOVELISTS

The 1980.s witnessed a new path and vigour of the Indian English fiction. The leader of this movement is Salman Rushdie. The appearance of *Midnight's Children (1981)* brought about a renaissance in Indian English fiction. The book has also won the prestigious .Booker Prize. After the great success of *Midnight's Children*, a group of young novelists eagerly, following in Rushdie's footsteps called as .Rushdie's Children. appeared in the 1980's. Among these, the most talented ones are Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry and Boman Desai. They are highly educated and actively involved in the public life as beaurocrats. They turned to life and experience as they knew them first hand. They are not romantic dreamers. They felt and experienced the pain of the living and portrayed it in their works.

## 1.7 WOMEN NOVELISTS

Many women novelists both in quantity as well as quality substantially contributed to the Indian Writing in English literature. Indian Women novelists like Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Attia Husain, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, and Kamala Das made significant contribution to Indian novel in English. Mrs. Choshal (Swarna Kumari Dabi) was the first Bengali woman novelist whose works were translated into English. Among the Indian Women novelists, Kamala Markandaya is the most popular novelist of the first generation novelists. Kamala Markandaya in her novel *Some Inner Fury* brought out clearly the tragedies associated with politics. Markandaya in a novel titled *Nectar in a Sieve* brought out certain facts of life such as fear, despair and hunger as constant companions of peasants. She postulated that the heart tempered in flames of love and faith, suffering and sacrifice will not accept defeat. Kamala Markandaya through her novel *A Silence of Desire* entered into the realms of spiritual realities. Her novel *Possession* does not really convince the readers about the spiritual convictions on which the novel is based upon. In *The Coffer Dams*, confrontation between technological advancement and human traditions has been vividly picturised. Her deep agony for those who undergo onslaught on Muslims is clearly visible in the novel. The theme of her fifth novel *A Handful of Rice* is urban economics. It is purely an Indian tale realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation. Next to Kamala Markandaya, we can consider the name of Ruth Prawar Jhabvala. In the words of K.R.S. Iyengar:

Mrs. Ruth Prawar Jhabvala's novels have a clear perception while describing the domestic scene and in projection the foreignness in India. In her fiction some people and situations appear more intrinsically funny than others. Mrs. Jhabvala makes us laugh or at least smile by delicately exposing human follies and foibles. There is a touch of compassion.

Mrs. Attia Hossain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is in four parts. The narrator heroine, Laila, is a spectator for 20 years during which India moved from colonization to independence. She writes with a feeling for places, events and words.

Anita Desai is the most renowned woman novelist among psychological novelists. Anita Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* are revelations of the inner climate, grappling with thoughts, emotions and feelings. Her novels brought in the psychological turn to Indian fiction. She has touched the nuances and subtleties of fiction hitherto unknown in Indian fiction in English. All her women are conscious of their existence and their needs. Shashi Deshpande is one novelist who is rising like a star among women novelists of India. Her women are educated, self-conscious, and sensitive. Their revolt against the rigid social and family set up comes out of necessity. For example Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, goes through traumatic experiences simply because she is highly skilled, intelligent and competent than her husband. In her novels like *That Long Silence and A Matter of Time* Deshpande has subtly and accurately described the silence which has been thrust on Indian women for centuries. Nayantara Sahgal published both fiction and nonfiction. Her novel *This Time of Morning* contained the details of the power politics that were going on within the corridors of the parliament and the drawing rooms of the powerful politicians. Her latest novel *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with the problems of partition in Punjab. Women in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal are liberal and crave

to establish their individuality. Saru, the female protagonist,\'s longing for love and understanding is beautifully depicted in this novel. Love, lust, war, politics, economic, social tensions, aspirations, disappointments, prejudices, riches and rags, life\'s intricate and inner feelings, sensualities and spiritualities have all been delineated clearly in the novels of the women novelists who contributed very much to the Indian Writings in English literature. An analysis of the novels by Indian women novelists reveals that these novelists have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters. The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women comes to full light in their novels.

## 1.8 SUMMARY

Indian English fiction began with a variety of historical fiction in the novels of Bannkin Chandra Chatterjee.s *Raj Mohan.s Wife*, S.K. Ghosh.s *The Prince of Destiny* and S.K. Mitia.s *Hindupur*. In the nineteen twenties and thirties, social and political awareness and the writer.s zeal for social reform gave way to the birth of .Social Novel.. The desire to improve the state of the people particularly, the downtrodden and outclassed people became the subject matter of the Indian novel in this period. It can be observed from the novel *Murugan, the Tiller (1927)* to *The Untouchable*. The struggle for independence became one unifying force in the two decades preceding the actual achievement of political freedom.

Many of the novelists of the period could not escape from this unifying force and they dealt with it at great length in their works. The experience shared by the people has turned out to be the core of their writings. In 1950.s and 1960.s the shift of interest from *the public to the private*; from *the Society to the Individual* can be observed. .The individual\'s quest for the self, has become the predominant theme in this period. Their main intention is .Man. but not .Society. The appearance of *Midnight\'s Children (1981)* brought another change in the direction of the Indian Novel. It has brought about a renaissance in Indian English fiction. It has explained the need of the writer.s response towards the society and its changes. They are playing .the role of writer as a teacher.. .The future of Indian fiction is indeed full of promise. Recent fiction has given ample evidence of vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity.

As said by K.R. Srinivas Iyenger. (p.518)

The success of Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and other popular world class Indian English novelists has turned the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar into a reality. The future of Indian fiction is indeed full of promise.

## 1.9 SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Explain the role played by the famous trio (R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand) in the development of the Indian English Novel.
2. Explain the influence of Bengal Renaissance in the development of the form of novel in India.
3. Explain the prominent themes of the Indian English novel in the 1930.s and 40.s.
4. The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women came into light in the writings of Indian

Women Novelists. . Elucidate.

5. Explain the .Quest for Identify. as the main theme of Modern Indian English Fiction.

### **1.10 SUGGESTED READING**

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4. Srinivas Iyengar, K.R.S. *Contemporary Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, 1981.
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**Dr M. SURESH KUMAR**



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## LESSON 2

# SAROJINI NAIDU :THE TEMPLE

### OBJECTIVES:

- To provide a brief biographical , intellectual and Indian background of the poetry of Sarojini Naidu.
- To offer critical analyses of the prescribed poem.
- To focus on seminal aspects of the poetry of the writer.

### STRUCTURE:

- 2.1 The Writer Her Life and Works
- 2.2 Themes of Her Poetry
- 2.3 Analyses of the Poem, The Temple
  - 2.3.1 The Gate of Delight
  - 2.3.2 The Path of Tears
  - 2.3.3 The Sanctuary
- 2.3 Key Words
- 2.4 Sample Questions
- 2.5 Suggested Readings

### 2.1 THE WRITER - HER LIFE AND WORKS

Sarojini Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India. She Was a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter and one of the great orators of her time. She was famously known as Bharatiya Kokila (The Nightingale of India). Sarojini Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress. Sarojini Naidu was born on February 13, 1879. Her father Aghoranath Chattopadhyaya was a scientist and philosopher. He was the founder of the Nizam College, Hyderabad. Sarojini Naidus mother Barada Sundari Devi was a poetess and used to write poetry in Bengali. Sarojini Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. One of her brothers Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor.

Sarojini Naidu was a brilliant student. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. At the age of twelve, Sarojini Naidu attained national fame when she topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Her father wanted her to become a Mathematician or scientist but Sarojini Naidu was interested in poetry. She started writing poems in English. impressed by her poetry, Nizam of Hyderabad, gave her scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 16, she travelled to England to study first at King's College London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. There she met famous laureates of her time such as Arthur Simon and Edmond Gosse. It was Gosse who convinced Sarojini to stick to Indian themes-India's great mountains, rivers, temples, social milieu, to express her poetry. She depicted contemporary Indian life and events. Her collections "The Golden Threshold (1905)",



"The Bird of time (1912)", and "The Broken Wing (1912)" attracted huge Indian and English readership.

At the age of 15, she met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu and fell in love with him, a non-brahmin, and a doctor by profession. After finishing her studies at the age of 19, she married him during the time when inter caste marriages were not allowed. It was a revolutionary step but Sarojini's father fully supported her in her endeavour. Sarojini Naidu had a happy married life and had four children: Jayasurya, Padmaj, Randheer, and Leilamani. In 1925, Sarojini Naidu presided over the annual session of Indian National Congress at Kanpur. Sarojini Naidu played a leading role during the Civil Disobedience Movement and was jailed along with Gandhiji and other leaders. In 1942, Sarojini Naidu was arrested during the "Quit India" movement and was jailed for 21 months with Gandhiji. She had relationship with Gandhiji and used to call him "Mickey Mouse". After Independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh and died in office on March 2, 1949.

### **Her poetic career :**

Her poetic career extends roughly from 1890 to 1920 a period of thirty years, but the period of full Noon lasts only seventeen or nineteen years, from 1898 to 1915 or 1917, till she met Mahatma Gandhi in London and came under his magic spell. Her entire poetical career is contained in four slender volumes : "The Golden Threshold", "The Bird of Time", "The Broken Wing" (these three later on brought together under one-volume edition entitled "The Sceptred Flute," .

#### **The Golden Threshold:**

It consists of 40 short poems and borrows its title from the house which Sarojini Naidu had built for herself at Hyderabad and named "The Golden Threshold." It was published in England in 1905 by William Heinemann, London. It carried an introduction by Arthur Symons and was dedicated to Edmund Gosse, "Who first showed me the way to the Golden Threshold." The book was widely reviewed in England and shot the author to sudden fame. It was considered her finest effort. The London Times remarked that her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves.

#### **The Bird of Time :**

It was published in England (Heinemann London) in 1912. It was dedicated to her parents and contained interesting and important Introduction. It ran into five reprints by 1926. It contains 46 poems and takes its title from a verse of Omar Khayyam.

The Bird of Time has but a little way  
To fly and lo the bird is on the wing.

It was adorned by an excellent and well-reproduced portrait of the author and the quotation from Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam gave the readers a hint about the origin of the title, beside; it pointed out to a suggestion of a note that is struck in the poem. This volume was as Welcome to the lovers of poetry as the first one. It was equally eloquently applauded when it appeared, Edward Thomas (English poet and critic, 1878-1917) remarked "her poems achieve an uncommon outward gorgeousness and inward glory".

They are not addressed, to any one by name and it is not possible, if not difficult, to trace out the life sources or origins of such poetry. These poems show Mrs. Naidu's usual technical mastery of diction and metre; they possess the richness, even the luxuriance of the traditional Indian style on such a subject and exhibit quite a remarkable eloquence. Some critics may, however, see in them violence instead of strength, rhetoric instead of poetry. Leaving aside these matters of individual taste and feeling *The Temple* is undoubtedly a highly wrought and striking structure, though to some eyes the stones of which it is made may appear to be rather too highly coloured.

### **The Feather of the Dawn :**

It is a collection of Sarojini's poems, like *The Sceptred Flute*, edited and collected in a volume by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu. These contain poems written during a period of great political activity, particularly in 1927, and not published till then.

## **2.2 THEMES OF HER POETRY**

### **Major themes of her poetry :**

Broadly speaking, her verse can be divided into five major divisions, which are as follows :

1. The simple joys and hopes and fears and lives of the common-folk in town and country I.e. the folk theme.
2. The irresistible fascination which Nature, especially springtime, exercises over her, i.e., the nature theme.
3. The aches and ecstasies of love, i.e., the love theme.
4. The ever-present challenge of suffering and loss to the human spirit. i.e. The theme of Death to Life.
5. Poems miscellaneous—the theme of such poems do not come in anyone of the above categories.

### **The folk-theme:**

This theme she has peculiarly made her own, and it is here that she appears to be least imitative. Most of the poems of this theme are contained in her first two volumes, *The Golden Threshold* and *The Bird of Time* and grouped together under the nomenclature of "folk Songs" and "Indian Folk Songs." The headings are somewhat misleading, for the pieces grouped are not all songs sung or supposed to be sung by the folk; there are also among them songs about the folk. However, between them they constitute the folk-theme. *The Palanquin-Bearers* is a good example of the true folk-songs. It recalls a common experience of half a century ago and it expresses in its movement the muffled mumblings which conditioned the rhythm of their march through the streets. Other successful songs of this theme are *Corn Grinders*, *Village Songs* and *Songs of Radha the Milkmaid*, the last named being the most familiar of the three. *Indian Weavers*, *Street Cries*, *in the Bazaars of Hyderabad* and *Bangle-Sellers* are a class by themselves and come within the larger class of folk-poems. They may not be marked

by the characteristic simple charm of songs supposed to be sung by the folk, but they drew poetic attention on common men and women at their daily tasks and at the same time relate their activities and vocations to the vicissitudes and changing aspects of human life. They have a dimension of meaning, which is not found in the genuine folk-song. *Indian Weavers* is an allegory, *Street Cries* presents a link between the different cries of the vendors and the different human needs and moods. We do not see so much the changing phases of life in *the Bazaars of Hyderabad* and the emphasis is laid on the many-splendored thing that life can be. The poem opens with a question to the merchants, what is it which they sell, the vendors, maidens, pedlars, goldsmiths, fruit men, musicians and magicians are also similarly questioned, and they answer that they sell wares, ranging from "saffron and lentil and rice" to "spells for the aeons to come.." From the flower-girls of the fifth and the last stanzas we realise that life is of mingled yarn, grave and gay together.

### **Nature theme, particularly of spring:**

A number of her poems were written on the theme, relating to the appeal of Nature, particularly spring. Such poems are grouped together as "Songs of the Spring-time" and "The flowering Year." No claim can be made for any one of them being outstanding or first-rate lyric. They are at best pretty as well as sincere. They all express her genuine excitement over the sights and sounds and scents of earth, especially in spring. They are touched at times with a gentle melancholy over the absence of the loved one from the scene of such delights. They do not entitle her to a high place among the Nature poets, notwithstanding they reveal her general buoyancy, her sensitiveness to all forms of beauty, and her great zest for life.

There are two or three songs among them, which commemorate and poorly the season of summer, only one *Autumn Song*, and none about winter. "Songs of the Spring-time" starts with the song, entitled *Spring* and can be regarded as a good specimen of the class. The next poem, *A Song in Spring* introduces a melancholy note. It deviates from the wild bees and wild birds and fireflies of Spring to

*What do you know in your blithe, brief season  
Of dream deferred and a heart grown old ?*

and the declaration, "But the wild winds know". The theme of a heart grown old recurs in *Vasant Panchami* which expresses Lilavati's lament at the feast of spring. There is also a touch of mild melancholy in *in a Time of Flowers*, but it is soon banished by a note of joy which spring brings. A group of four poems in *Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms, Nasturtiums, Golden Cassia and Champak Blossoms* are devoted to the theme of individual manifestations of Nature's beauty. A poem, from "The flowering Year," entitled, *The Magic of Spring*, marks a characteristic contrast to *The Coming of Spring*, which just precedes it. The poet exhibits herself here as despondent because she cannot reach to greet the spring as she did of old, and the ultimate triumph of the spring over her despondency. The note in *June Sunset*, another poem worth mentioning, is neither of regret nor rapture, it breathes contentment and tranquility.

### **The Theme of Love :**

This theme has frequently broken into poems that are primarily in praise of Nature or spring. It is ever present in her work, and almost every one poem in three among her poems is a love poem of one kind or another. *A Rajput Love Song* faithfully catches at the longing of lovers for each other with a truly oriental splendour. *A Persian Love Song*, which follows, expresses the mood of love in a calm weather, in the serenity of which the 10 vers are conscious of their oneness through love. The overpowering and strong ecstasy of loving and being loved so as to be almost unbearable is exhibited in the *Ecstasy*. In *The Poet's Love* the poetess reveals another aspect of love viz., the lover when far away from his beloved, is wrapped in dreams all day, but not so at night. In *Alone* the sense of loneliness is present. The woman, separated from her lover, receives comfort by addressing the morning star. In *A Love Song from the North* the forsaken one cannot bear to hear the papeeha's call or similar joyous sights and sounds, for they bring to the memory the dreams of delight that are gone. In *Caprice* and in *Destiny* the poetess reveals how the maidens' hearts are broken by those not worthy of love. In *Longing* the heart that is broken still hopes for the wayward lover. The memory of love, however short-lived, is a dear memory, and it is better to have loved and lost than never to have known love. This theme is expressed in *The Festival of Memory*.

There is a group of twenty-four love poems at the end of her last volume, under the title, "The Temple," which contain the deep mystic fervour which inspired them. They are sub-titled as "A Pilgrimage of Love". The pilgrimage to the Temple is worked out in three stages of eight poems each.

There is much in her love poetry which is pretty, extravagant, needlessly wordy, or merely pretty. But they all reveal a sensitive and passionate spirit and strike a note which the readers of English poetry are not familiar. The hyperboles and conceits in them are in the tradition of oriental rather than English poetry, but it is the spirit and inspiration in them, which makes them really worth reading.

They could have been composed only by a woman, steeped to the core by the Hindu way of life and bred up in the traditions of secular and religious, Hindu love poetry.

### **The theme of the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life:**

This theme is found to have incidentally crept into some of her poems, but there are at least one dozen of her poems, which are concerned wholly with this theme. Her mood is not consistent in the treatment of this theme. We find in her poems the mood, for instance of utter despair expressed in the sonnet, *Love and Death*. The triumph of Death over Love is made the subject of lamentation by her :

*O Love, alas, that love not assuage  
The burden of thy human heritage,  
Or save thee from the swift decrees of Death.*

In *To the God of Pain* she depicts herself as an unwilling priestess in the temple of the god and completely spent up herself she seeks for release from his service.

In *Past and Future*, confronted with the future, as the past has retreated like a hermit into his cell, she is in a mood of expectation without knowing what it she is expecting is Her spirit in these poems is shown to be crushed and awed by fate.

She is overwhelmed with a realization of her utter helplessness and that of her kind before the wind of change, which sweeps aside one sorrow to bring another, this theme is introduced into the profoundly moving poem, *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus*.

She asks, what mystic rapture, what peace, unknown to the world of men is the secret of Lord Buddha, seated on his Lotus-throne, far away from the sufferings and strife, the unsatisfied hunger of the soul, and the futile strivings of the spirit. In *the Forest, Transience*, and *At Twilight* we have a different mood, which may be regarded as the twilight mood. She is coming out of the gloom, but is not completely nut of it.

Life and Death are not mighty opposites, but two aspects of a single reality, this fact is revealed in poems called *Life, The Soul's Payer*, and *Invincible*. In *A Challenge to Fate* and *In Salutatain to the Eternal Peace* we see her indomitable spirit, which clearly and courageously asserts her strong faith.

### **Miscellaneous themes :**

There are her other poems which do not fall within the four groups mentioned above, they either contain two or more of the above themes in them, or are on themes different from these ones. Such a one is her poem, called *Bells*, which is outside her four major groups, and yet it reflects almost all of them. *Indian Dancers, The Indian Gipsy, The Queen's Rival, Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad, To India* and *Guerdon* are some of her other miscellaneous poems. *To India, The Gift of India* and *The Lotus* express a tribute to the Motherland, the poet's devotion to her country or her hopes, India's glorious renaissance. In the *Harvest Hymn* and the *Hymn to Indra* she reminds of India's Vedic heritage. In *Lakshmi, the Lotus-Born, Kali, the Mother*, and *The Flute Player of Brindabanare* depicted pauranic and modern traditions. In *Nasturtiums and Damayanti to Nala* she tells us how much the great stories have meant to her and poems like *she .loyal Tombs of Golconda* and *Imperial Delhi* bring before us the tragic pageant of Indian history.

### **2.3 ANALYSES OF THE POEM "THE TEMPLE"**

There is a constellation of love -poems at the end of her last volume, twenty four in all, which are significantly grouped under the collective title, *The Temple*. They have their mainspring in the deep mystic fervour that is emphasized under the subtitle, *A Pilgrimage of Love*. And the pilgrimage towards the Temple is carefully wrought in three stages of 8poems each. "The Temple, A Pilgrimage of Love" is Sazojini Naida's most comprehensive statement of love. The poem attempts to organize the lyric impulses and emotions into a unified structure of experience. The motif of pilgrimage and the central symbol of the temple bind the poet- lover's personal insights and magian

intuitions to the flood of pardon. The images and metaphors employed to describe love's progress are mostly conventional and brought together in the poet's usual "purple manner."

But the interplay of different conventions Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Christian creates something new and positive, extending and diversifying the vision of love as a sacred ritual experience. In following the prescribed path of adoration, and in performing the appropriate rites of worship, the poet restores the primacy of the creative imagination into the action of love. The pilgrim's progress, as is implicit in the symbolism of the Hindu Temple, is not linear, but cyclical. The sacred orbit, the "Pradakshina - Pathas," is itself circumambulatory. The path envisages the union of antinomies the figure and the mania, the subject and the object of adoration- Every point in the path is the "still point of the turning world." A point where the world-axis intersects the time-space continuum. The inner sanctuary is a womb-like void, the unfathomed zero, the point of return and origin. The structure of the poem is also such that the experience of love communicated is not additive, but cumulative, not sequential but simultaneous and Circumambient\_ It is a poem in which the disparate epiphanies grow together, as in a musical fugue. Through a union of movements, a rhythm of exchanges and a chant of meditations, it builds up a cosmic passion concluding itself in the Dance of Being. The epigraph at the beginning of the poem is taken from Tagore. It sets the Vaishnavite context of the poem:

*My passion shall burn as the flame of Salvation,  
The Flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of Devotion.*

Sarojini inscribes her own emblems and figures, of an intensely experienced ecstasy, into the traditional ethos of the Bhakti cult. The tonal elaboration of the devotional sentiment in the various sections of the poem indicates that the poet draws inspiration and resonance from many other sources as well. This is not surprising, because Sarojini Naidu was a believer in India as the become and ground of religious and cultural synthesis.

Love for Sarojini Naidu is not so much the Source and object of desire as of memory. Love as memory is a "twin natured" boom of agony and so bliss. How may one day true homage to love, which is

*Fulfillment and fare eve!!  
Concentrated in a kiss?*

What preparations for meeting, What disciplines of separation, can ever equip the self to match the contingent power of love? The lover has a choice of roles, as bride and votary, saint and martyr, poet and prophet. Yet, love is all notations of conscious will and more. It demands nothing short of a total human response. Prayer, not praise, is the proper tribute to love. In her short poem, entitled "The Temple" Sarojini Naidu refers to "Love's radiant hour of Praise" and the ritual offerings presented at the shrine. The poet can offer only her broken lute and wounded heart as gifts of adoration. It is however, in "The Temple, A pilgrimage of Love" that Sarojini Naidu presents an extensive treatment of love as a sacred experience, as a journey of the magian lover, restoring the primacy of the creative imagination to the act of love.

### **2.3.1 The Gate of Delight:**

The pilgrimage starts with *The Gate of Delight* and the eight poems of this stage show that Love's bondage is true freedom and true bliss in the sacrifices it

demands. In the opening poem. *The Offering*, the woman is unable to bring beauty or greatness to Love's shrine. She can instead yet bring a devotion that asks for no recompense.

*But I have naught save my heart's deathless passion.  
That craves no recompense divinely sweet.  
Content to wait in proud and lowly:  
fashion And kiss the shadow of Love's passing feet.*

The devotee in *The Feast* likewise smears her head and eyelids with the "entranced and flowering dust" that Love has honoured with his tread, happy to bear Love's foot-prints on her breast, and eager to have as a priceless boon.

*All the sorrow of your years,  
All the secret of your tears.*

In Ecstasy the woman does not call at all for the glories that spring brings, for

*I have plucked you, O miraculous flower of desire.  
and crushed between my lips the burning petals of your mouth!  
I have drunk the deep. Delicious nectar of your breath I  
Wilder music thrilled me when the rivers of your blood  
Swept over the flood-gates of life\_ to drown my wailing heart.*

In *The Lute Song* the beloved tells her lover that he does not need a mirror, a lute. or silks; her eyes, her voice, her heart ' will serve instead.

"If you call me I will come" swiftly and fearlessly, says the maiden in the next poem.

*The Sins of Love* is a poem of forgiveness. For the sins of looking on the face of her touching his body, and for assailing him her silence or her song she asks for a pardon. She feels guilty of this supreme sin.

*The Desire of love* is a short, simple song, but intense and full of passion.  
*O could I brew my Soul like wine  
To make you strong,  
O could I carve your freedom sword  
Out of my song  
Instill into your mortal flesh  
Immortal breath, Triumphantly to conquer Life  
And trample Death !  
What starry height of sacrifice  
Were left untrod,  
So could my true love fashion you  
Into a God ?*

In the last poem of this section viz., *The Vision of Love*, the woman has totally become oblivious of all knowledge except of her beloved and to her enraptured sight he is the sovereign and sweet reality, the splendour of the morning star, the might and magic of the sea, the subtle fragrance of the spring, the fruit of all Time's harvesting, His is the sacred fountain from which her spirit draws all sustenance and he is the temple of her woe and bliss:

*All pain is compassed by your frown,  
 AU joy is centered in your kiss.  
 You are the substance of my breath  
 And you the mystic pang of Death.*

### 2.3.2 The Path of Tears:

The pilgrim of Love must tread the path of Tears. after having come through the Gate of Delight. The path of Tears is strewn with tears of humiliation, true love, long-suffering and self-denying, on passing through which pride is to be overcome, whether in the loved one's spirit or in the lover's own. In the eight poems of the section consequently, the faithful lover laments the other's pride and disdain and cruelty.

The Sorrow of Love is the opening poem. in it the woman complains that her beloved has turned his face away from her. He has done so because he is afraid, perhaps that his strength and pride suffer if he continues to give himself to her But he cannot keep himself away for long.

*Turn not your face from me, O Love I  
 Shall Sorrow or Death conspire  
 To Set our suffering spirits free  
 From the bondage of Memory.  
 Or the thrall of the desire ?*

In *The Silence of Love* she is determined that though she has given her lover the whole joy of her flesh and the treasure of her soul, she will demand no answering gift from him,

*The Menace of Love opens  
 How long, O Love, shall ruthless pride avail you Or wisdom shield you with her.  
 gracious wing. When the sharp winds of memory shall assail you.*

*In all the poignant malice of the spring " ? and ends*

*When youth, and spring passion shall betray you And mock your proud rebellion  
 with defeat God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you As you lie spent and  
 broken at my feet.*

Even humiliation at the hands of the loved one is Sweet and is begged as a rich reward, This is expressed in *Love's Guerdon*.

The lover is ready to welcome the loved one's death in desperation at her plight. This is the theme of *If you were Dead*. It would remove the sword of pride that lies between them in life.

*If You were dead, I should not weep  
 How sweetly would our hearts unite  
 In a dint, undivided sleep,  
 Locked in Deaths deep and narrow night, All anger fled, all sorrow past,  
 O Love. at last I*



In *Supplication* the broken-hearted maiden would pardon all the wrong done to her. By finding relief in tears the withering of all her hopes and the utter deadness of life would be paid scant or no attention by her. She asks only this much from the loved one, for she is not the mistress even of her tears.

The loved one, drenched with life-drops of the heart, he has killed, is the Slayer in the poem of the same name. This conceit is carried even further in the last poem of this section. *The Secret*.

### 2.3.3 The Sanctuary:

In the last section. *The Sanctuary*. the shrine, the lover must be prepared to worship with the utmost devotion. even to the point of a joyous surrender of life itself. In the first poem of this section entitled *The Fear of Love* the maiden fears of some kind of harm coming to her beloved, hence she builds a shrine for him against covetous Time and fate and he needs to be rescued from her own heart's desire.

What Sanctuary can I pledge  
Whose very loves of you is sacrilege?  
O I would save you from thee ravening fire.  
Of my own heart's desire.

*The Illusion of Love*, likewise, is marked by a passionate devoetion to the loving one, her beloved seems more than a transient spark of flickering flame, since he kindles her darkness with immortal lustre. It is more than a common shell winnowed from the sea, as he makes audible to her the subtle murmurs of eternity.

In *The Worship of Love* she asks to be crushed by her lover like a leaf or basil bloom; she asks to be burnt like a sandal grain.

Then follow *Love Triumphant*, *Love Omnipotent* and *Love Transcendent*. The woman would shield her beloved from the world's horror or hate in the first, even if his hands were stained with blood guiltiness. She would *endure* any suffering to succor him and hush his anguish in her breast. In the second she expresses a desire to undertake the most arduous or impossible task *for* the sake of his beloved. *Love Transcendent* recalls the Vision on the Day of *Judgment*. when the beloved. her "saint with the sinless eyes," will be crowned amid the peaceanointed and she herself will be hurled from Heaven's high battlement. But her fall will be brightened by the recollection of his radiant face when she will sing a paean to thrill the dead with his deathless name so that he be safe.

*So you be safe in God's mystic garden,  
In closed like a star in his ageless skies.  
My outlawed spirit shall crave no pardon.  
O my saint with the sinless eyes !*

In *Invocation* the woman in love asks the Star of her Trust *to* shine upon her stragglng spirit, so that it *may* be elevated. Her spirit. she is confident. can he chastened by his wrath and grief and stern agonizing silence. And lastly the sentiment in *Devotion* is direct and brief.

### Sarojini's vision of love :

There is much, it is said, in her love *poetry* which is extravagant, needlessly wordy, or merely pretty. But, it expresses a sensitive and passionate soul and strikes a note with which the readers of English poetry are not familiar. Much of the hyperboles and conceits are in the tradition of oriental rather than English poetry; it is not this but the spirit and inspiration of her love poetry which really is significant. It could have been written only by a woman brought up in the Hindu way of life and in the Traditions of Hindu love – poetry, religious and secular.

Her love poetry traverses Love's *whole* expanse—the fifty different sharps and flats of this ecstasy and pain, except that we do not find in it the neo-modernist naked sex and the Freudian subtle anatomization.

Sarojini writes much from personal experience, but there is much that is conventional. Her love poetry embodies a hundred moods : irony, hope, despair, expectation, the mood of challenge and the ecstatic mood. Love is portrayed in a hundred states.— depressed, ecstatic, romantic, spiritual and the state of shared pain and Joy, and it, is in a hundred situations the *situation* of separation temporary or by death, in he situation of suspicion or jealousy, and it is love, aggressive and delicate.

Her love poetry does not enunciate any philosophy of love; it does not express love *in* abstraction It deals with love which is deeply felt and realized in life, against the back-ground of Vasant or Nature in general or even against the background of common sights and common people around. She treats of the colorful and romantic aspect of love in her early poetry. But her later poetry holds the mirror to a different vision.

Her poems of love suggest the depth and intensity of love experience. Her own experience and her knowledge of the intensity enchanting world of devotional love-poetry must have made her to realize that love is a dominant force that could lead to transcendence Love means to her self-abnegation and self surrender. Love without a sense of merger is no love and her soul would rest with the delicate silence of love, love that bears it out to the edge of doom.

### 2.4. KEY WORDS

**Delight:** a feeling of great pleasure

**Passion:** a very strong feeling of love, hatred, anger, enthusiasm, etc.

**Recompense:** something, usually money, that you are given because you have suffered in some way, or as a payment for something

**Divinely :** n a way that comes from or is connected with God or a god

**Drown :** to die because you have been underwater too long and you cannot breathe; to kill somebody in this way

**Wailing :** a long loud high cry made by somebody who is sad or in pain

**Brew :** brew something to make beer

**Mortal :** that cannot live forever and must die

**Instill** : to gradually make somebody feel, think or behave in a particular way over a period of time

**Compassed** : an instrument for finding direction, with a needle that always points to the north  
**Frown** to make a serious, angry or worried expression by bringing your eyebrows closer together so that lines appear on your forehead

**My stic** : a person who tries to become united with God through prayer and meditation and so understand important things that are beyond normal human understanding

**Pang** : a sudden strong feeling of physical or emotional pain

**Conspire** : to secretly plan with other people to do something illegal or harmful

**Bondage** : the state of being a slave or prisoner

**Thrall** : controlled or strongly influenced by somebody/something

**Avail** : of little or no use

**Gracious** : kind, polite and generous, especially to somebody of a lower social position

**Assail** to attack somebody/something violently, either physically or with words

**Sanctuary** : an area where wild birds or animals are protected and encouraged to breed

**Guerdon** :

**Miraculous** : completely unexpected and very lucky

**Nectar** : a sweet liquid that is produced by flowers and collected by bees for making honey

## 2.5. SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate the love poems of Sarojini Naidu with reference to ‘ The Temple’.
2. How doe Sarojini Naidu show that Loves bondage is true freedom in the The Gate of Delight?
3. The Path of Tears is strewn with Tears of humiliation, true love and long suffering, Elucidate?
4. How I the lover prepared to worship with utmost devotion even to the point of a joyous surrender of life itself in The Sanctuary ?

## 2.6. SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Ibid.*, “ The Temple,” P.148.
2. *Ibid.*, “ To Love” .P. 83
3. Rabindranath Tagore, quoted by Sarojini Naidu in the epigraph to “ The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love”. From *The Sceptred Flute*, P.209.
4. *Ibid.*, “The Vision of Love”, P.217.
5. *The Lyric spring: Poetic Achievement of Sarojini Naidu* Dr.P.V. Rajya Lakshmi, Abhinav publications.Jan1,1977.

**DR. P.N.V.D.MAHESH**

## LESSON 3

# THE TEMPLE – SAROJINI NAIDU

### OBJECTIVES:

The principal objective of the lesson is to enable the students comprehend the idea that Indian Writing in English is a separate entity under English Literature; and that the language though Western in origin is indigenous in usage; significantly by Sarojini Naidu. The total background to the series “**The Temple**” provides an idea about the Indian culture and traditions; but the theme is universal. Healthy amalgamation of two of the finest qualities belonging to either sides of the globe would culminate in domestic sophistication; as is visible in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry.

### STRUCTURE:

- 3.1 Prolusion
- 3.2 The Gate of Delight
  - 3.2.1 The Offering
  - 3.2.2 The Feast
  - 3.2.3 Ecstasy
  - 3.2.4 The Lute Song
  - 3.2.5 If You Call Me
  - 3.2.6 The Sins of Love
  - 3.2.7 The Desire of Love
  - 3.2.8 The Vision of Love
- 3.3 The Path of Tears
  - 3.3.1 The Sorrow of Love
  - 3.3.2 The Silence of Love
  - 3.3.3 The Menace of Love
  - 3.3.4 Love’s Guerdon
  - 3.3.5 If you were Dead
  - 3.3.6 Supplication
  - 3.3.7 The Slayer
  - 3.3.8 The Secret
- 3.4 The Sanctuary
  - 3.4.1 The Fear of Love
  - 3.4.2 The Illusion of Love
  - 3.4.3 The Worship of Love
  - 3.4.4 Love Triumphant
  - 3.4.5 Love Omnipotent
  - 3.4.6 Love Transcendent
  - 3.4.7 Invocation
  - 3.4.8 Devotion
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Technical Terms
- 3.7 Self-Assessment Questions
- 3.8 Reference Books

### 3.1 PROLUSION

The songs on love by Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, have been pirouetted under three sub-headings: (1) The Gate of Delight (2) The Path of Tears and (3) The Sanctuary. The entire series is called the Temple – a shrine where one seeks expression, evocation and emancipation. The lover transforms into a devotee. Sarojini Naidu's eloquent and elegant use of English language enhances the cultural and romantic themes of her nascent poetry. Flavour and fragrance exude the recital of the poems. Hearts pulsate, reverberating the tender vibrations flowing undercurrent. Myriad hues transmute; scintillating chimeras erupt and emerge in our vision. The world around turns into a different planet – surplus in love and scarce in hatred.

### 3.2 THE GATE OF DELIGHT

Each of these sub-headings is an octet – consisting of eight poems each. The first octet i.e., The Gate of Delight comprises (1) The Offering (2) The Feast (3) Ecstasy (4) The Lute Song (5) If you call me (6) The Sins of Love (7) The Desire of Love; and (8) The Vision of Love. These poems are an articulation of the cheerful and propitious nature of intense love and the feelings involved therein. The lover's desire to offer anything for love, expecting nothing in return; the extent of ecstasy enjoyed in the process of love; immortalising love by rejecting its physical attributes; the joy experienced by a lover waiting for the call of love; the melancholic manner in seeking pardon for one's tantalising behaviour; the confidence of bestowing one's love with immortality; and finally the omnipresence of love being both breath and death to the lover; contribute to the pristine flawlessness of the poem.

#### 3.2.1 The Offering:

Love is the altar, the sanctum sanctorum, which far surpasses any other traits like beauty, youth or reputation. The lover reflects a delightfully poignant demeanour while trying to gain the favour of love. The lovelorn is ready to abandon beauty, in speculation of its possession, like a blossom and offer it at the sanctuary of love; to relinquish juvenescence like a pearl by tossing it into the sparkling wine of love; to dispense reputation by cascading eminence and status into the sacrificial flame of love. But not being in possession of any such traits, except a passionate heart that seeks no restitution; the lover, immersed in the joy of love is ready to wait in all humility for the sake of winning an opportunity to kiss the shadow of the fleeting feet of love.

The imagery used by the poetess reminds us of Keats' imagery in Ode to a Nightingale

*O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth;*

And Ode to a Grecian Urn –

*Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,*

*Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?*

- though permeating Indian culture.

Love is further personified and shown to be flitting while offering solace to many a lovelorn heart; accepting gifts from enthusiasts. The fact that beauty, youth and eminence could be discarded with least regret in exchange for gaining the pleasure of ambrosial love; is worth its weight in love. Moreover the lover's humility and undying passion yearning to caress the frisking feet of love are an ample proof of the allurements love holds out to mortals.

### **3.2.2 The Feast:**

The frisking feet of love treading through Time had left behind blooming and bewitching particles of love; encompassing the world. The lover is willing to gather this dust and use it as a substitute to the fragrant sandal paste; by applying it to one's eyelids and forehead. A garland made of aromatic lotuses touched by the moon and fondled by the dew are not needed by the lover because the memory of age-old dreams about love are sufficient to suffice the tender hearts that bear the imprint of love's flitting feet. Gems and pearls secured from seas and across the world, though precious in many ways, stand no comparison to the priceless boon granted by Love in the form of camouflaged experiences. These exploits are prized pearls to be treasured in the hearts of the lover.

No physical adornments, either olfactory or ocular, can measure up to the fortune secured out of experiencing love. Love, which is boundless, fathomless and inexhaustible leaves behind nostalgic memories that are irascible.

### **3.2.3 Ecstasy:**

The lover in this poem experiences ecstasy beyond assessment and expresses the irrepressible joy thus. Nature unleashes the spring season and the glittering sun illumines the hills of the western hemisphere to be sheathed in light. The same light may awaken the valleys in the south and inflame them. Love, the blooming blossom of desire is held on to tightly, in the mouth of the lover, producing heavenly music. The current of the twisted breeze diffuses the scents of spring unrestrainedly to woo the honeybees to the florets; but the scent of love, much sweeter than the nectar the honeybees collect; has enticed the lover whose soul is intoxicated with the spirits of love. Besides the visual feast, the spring season bestows; the aural gratification is furnished through the cascading rapids and rivers in spate.

The lover, in the meanwhile is inundated in a wilder form of melody that may be heard in the deluge of blood flow due to the barraging of the floodgates of love and engulfing the very existence of the lover.

The poetess here expresses through her imagery, similes and metaphors the effects of being deluded by the torrential feeling of love. The scents and scenes of spring season that provide a feast to all the senses; in fact actually exhilarate, intoxicate and galvanize an individual into losing consciousness to worldly happenings; while aiding in the attainment of

an utopian delight. To state quite straightforwardly, the poetess acknowledges acquiescence to Love; benumbed of all other worldly sensations.

#### **3.2.4. The Lute Song:**

This song verbalises the most profound and unfeigned adulation of the lover. The imperial and dazzling countenance of love does not need a looking-glass to reflect itself – the eyes of the lover, a repository of longing, are better equipped to reveal its lustre and elegance. Further there is no paucity of praise for the proud and prestigious love; while the lover is inclined to disseminate the euphony of love's pluck and popularity. Love, in no way need appeal for soft blue fabric and velvety cushions to recline upon; when the lovers' heart is laid bare for it to relax. Where is the need for love to appeal and seek atonement or absolution in order to overcome life's intensity, inanity and anxiety? It can take refuge in the lovers' soul, which has been burning pure in unshaken and perpetual love for many years.

#### **3.2.5. If You Call Me:**

The lover is ready to approach his love the moment he is sent for; faster than a frightened deer or gasping dove; darting beyond the speed of the dancing snake to the tune of a charmer's control. The lover is well-equipped to take off the minute love calls him; leaving behind the fear that might supervene. The lover is inclined to sprint, overtaking the pace of desire and even lightning whose feet can travel faster than any other. Irrespective of the gloomy times that may creep in uninvited or Death's deep fissure, the lover is prepared to approach love undaunted regardless of what might transpire to occur.

#### **3.2.6. The Sins of Love:**

The lover seeks forgiveness from his ladylove for having let loose his eyes from committing the sin of trespassing into the domain of her face and gazing at it. The lover's eyes were like wild birds that soared unflinchingly high into the sky, which provided an oasis of inexorable pleasure for them. So also the lover's eyes dauntlessly feasted on the face of his lover; which in fact is the sanctified domain that provides much joy to him. Secondly he seeks his lover's clemency is absolving him of the sin of allowing his hands to touch the ravishingly beautiful skin, fondle it; and grasp on tightly to it. By doing this, the lover has acquired gifts uncountable like grains of sand. Further the lover seeks reprieve from his ladylove for not having constrained his mouth from committing the sin of assaulting, skirting and oppressing his ladylove with stubborn silence or music. These acts were followed by violation of his ladylove's lips and bosom by the lover who through such assault sought to ease his agony. As a last gesture of seeking pardon, the lover accepts the sin of having tried to entice his ladylove's heart; in order to satiate his heart's desire and provide relief to his wounded heart.

#### **3.2.7. The Desire of Love:**

The lover wishes to relinquish his soul and prepare ambrosia from it that could make his sweetheart robust and dynamic; he wishes to contribute to her liberty through his music; yearns to infuse immortality into her temporal body and thereby help the transient self

conquer life and become invincible. The lover strongly feels that any renouncement, however perilous it may be, is not to be left untrodden so that love can chisel out a God from a lover.

### **3.2.8. The Vision of Love:**

The lover implores his ladylove that his silly heart and eyes have lost cognition of the entire world except herself; neither the revealing skies nor the blossoming earth fail to disclose any thing else other than the ladylove's lustrous face and a multitude of signs that reflect her elegance. The lover perceives his ladylove as the unique reality, ruling over the world. She is viewed as the magnificent, morning star; the strength and strains of the sea; the astute aroma of Spring; and the profuse produce of a period's product. The lover's frivolous faculties of reason and feeling envision only the ladylove, which is the lover's repository of sustenance; and from which his soul quenches its sorrow, hope and might; not only through every birth, but every hour. The lover addresses his lover as the disturbing sword and invaluable accolade in the temple of his sorrows and joys. The frown on his mistress's face is the source of all pain and her kiss is the centre of all jubilation. His love is tangible in his breath and also the transcendental twinge of his termination.

## **3.3 THE PATH OF TEARS**

The second octet **The Path of Tears** comprises 1) The Sorrow of Love 2) The Silence of Love 3) The Menace of Love 4) Love's Guerdon 5) If You were Dead 6) Supplication 7) The Slayer 8) The Secret. These poems are a proclamation of the cynical and despondent facets of love. The lover's inquisitiveness at trying to learn the reason for his ladylove's hostility and revulsion; his mute and muffled craving claiming a certain place in her thoughts, words and heart; his despair and disturbance that would deride and heckle her; the bullying, intimidation and harassment he receives as a reward from her; the thought of being able to unite with her after death as a welcome grievance; the several things in life he had to forfeit and implore her in the hope of winning her love; her callous and brutal attitude which successfully manipulated his massacre; and the futility of adulation he has achieved as an aftermath of his steadfast love remains squandered as none, except his ladylove, knew the truth that the lover had met his end; accord palpable solemnity and seriousness to the octet.

### **3.3.1 The Sorrow of Love:**

It has been more than a year the lovers had seen each other; and one lover enquires the other of the reason for detesting the other. What would happen if one touched the hand of the other or simply listened to the other speaking? Would their strength fail them or would they lose their pride? Is it grief or fear that is holding the lover back from communicating with the other? It was destined and their love was put to test in the fire of fate and the magical hour turned mysteriously powerful in separating them. Is it a consequence of this destiny that makes the lover shun the other; is it because of love or hate? The lover grieves over being forsaken by his ladylove and pleads with her to stop avoiding him. Even if Death and Sorrow colluded to unmanacle the anguished mood from the confinement of reminiscences or the subjugation of lust; he entreats her not to abhor him.



### 3.3.2 The Silence of Love:

Though the lover has bestowed and enriched his ladylove with almost everything in life; stipulated by the fact that she remains obligated to him throughout; she had been reluctant in her munificence and reticent in her magnanimity. His love towards her had been intensifying extensively; but hardly received any requisition or bequeathal from her unfavourable hand. The lover importunes his ladylove to entrust to him anything, which she happens to possess. The lover's breath itself is his ladylove, by which he survives. His days are filled with an insatiable fire of burning hunger entreating an exemption in her heart and head. The lover feels stifled to disclose his feelings in words and claims her resuscitating thought and time; which the lover considers condemned even before he confronts the situation. This he decides to shoulder uncomplainingly.

### 3.3.3 The Menace of Love:

The lover is being extremely ruthless with his ladylove when he questions her about the vicious arrogance she takes recourse to, in the process of avoiding memories that are mournfully malicious. He reminds her that his tormented gore and hankering melancholy would besiege her as the doleful lamentation of the seas. Further the restlessness of the ladylove's heart would leave her smitten with desire and render her sleepless; while the yearning in her veins would be quick and unabating as peals of fire. Ultimately when youth, spring (season of love) and passion turn disloyal to her and defeat her; then she would lie low at the lover's feet subdued. This was the time the lover was uncertain of – whether he would assist her or annihilate her.

### 3.3.4 Love's Guerdon:

In this particular verse, the lover emphasises on the tormenting torture he is put to, by his ladylove. The contusion caused due to the whammy walloping at the hands of his ladylove; yet remains the sweetest reward than all the other lavish souvenirs he received from other friends. Her forbidding, brutal laughter and the fiendish words that followed were the most stringent, yet gratifying invocation; juxtaposing the devotion and imploration of others or even the balmy love-melody of the chakora birds. Eventually the lover discovers that though his heart has been shattered and catapulted by his sweetheart he prefers being trampled by her at her feet to being enthroned euphorically all alone.

The spectacular strand of Sarojini Naidu's discernible imagery lends a certain august appeal to her poetry. Her technical efficacy is bewitching, ingenious and reminiscent of the nascent Indian surroundings. In concord with Bruce King's opinion that Indian English poets have indianised their poetry by making it an expression of Indian life as experienced; Sarojini Naidu's use of the chakora birds in this poem substantiates the view. Having followed Edmund Gosse's guidelines Sarojini Naidu abandoned the use of English countryside and harmonised her poems in painting the Indian landscapes in all its vigour, elegance and exoticism.

### 3.3.5 If You Were Dead:

This metrical composition reflects the acme of the octet wherein the lover declares his heart's hunger is to unite with his sweetheart; and in order to attain this tranquillity; he wouldn't mourn her death too! In the moment of her embracing eternal sleep, he earns succour laying his head among the garlands on her bosom. He opines that life was a screen that fenced lovers off; and dispassionate destiny, lingering beyond mortal jurisdiction, disarticulates them. Vanity, dangling like a swooping sword to severe hearts; and love, the infuriatingly unmanageable expanse of adversity could never be vanquished. But the hearts of lovers could unite under the mantle of death, the uninterrupted and interminable eternity; which unfastens fury and confiscates grief.

### 3.3.6 Supplication:

The lover ululates love for being such a misjudged fallacy that sabotaged his juvenile exuberance and blissful gratification. Further it has managed to contaminate the lover's sleep and day-to-day life also! Restitution of forbearance tranquillises the jubilant past by emerging to be hearteningly teary. Destitute for love, the lover is like a shrivelled leaf; scorched in the midday heat-like tribulations; undulated on the waves of fatigue; muffled in the crisscrossing currents of delight and distress; unalterable in the varying vistas of terrain and azure; unexcited at the rousing exaltations; and finally dishonouring reminiscences that are just left afloat. The lover is confident of love's inability to reinstall ecstasy, unauthorised hope, repudiated dreams, neglected ambition and destroyed dignity; in spite of his sweetheart possessing the console that regulates his feelings of sorrow, ecstasy and power. Hence the lover requests his sweetheart to provide him with a tearful present that could save his afflicted soul.

### 3.3.7 The Slayer:

In this verse, the lover epitomises his ladylove as an assassin who had contrived to slay him; and achieved it successfully. If some bystander, at the crack of dawn, queries his sweetheart on the reason for wearing garments dripping in the early morning dew and with a face and hair rinsed in cold spritz; the lover wants her to ordain the truth that the moisture droplets on her face, dress and hair were not droplets of dew or mist; but tears of death from the sorrowful eyes of the lover whom she had slaughtered using a brisk means of torment.

Further more he insists that his sweetheart confess to a carouser's inquisitive query about the shimmering crimson colour on her attire being a result of spilling wine or the dye of a crushed crimson coloured leaf. He wants her to reply truly that the crimson-coloured drops were the drops of the life fluid of the lover whom she killed wielding the cutting edge of despair.

### 3.3.8 The Secret:

The final poem in the second octet **The Path of Tears** is about a secret disclosed to the world through the lifeless lips of the late lover. The lover is being approached by men and women; proffering wreaths, presents, music and song as accolades to the lover's ardent affection. The lover deploras the fact that they are ignorant of the fact that he has been dead

for a number of grief-stricken days and wonders at how they would be primed up to the truth. He continues to speculate on the possibility of their knowing as to what happened to him that his fragile fantasy fervour presently lay flattened like mellowed fruit at his sweetheart's feet; and that she had catapulted his pulsating, passionate heart as food to the savage canines.

Clueless about the dire fate he had met at his sweetheart's hands, they try to embellish and applaud him with indispensable bounty. But the actuality that he has been lifeless was known to none; save his sweetheart.

### 3.4 THE SANCTUARY

The third octet **The Sanctuary** comprises 1) The Fear of Love 2) The Illusion of Love 3) The Worship of Love 4) Love Triumphant 5) Love Omnipotent 6) Love Transcendent 7) Invocation and 8) Devotion. These poems are a verbalisation of love transcending the physical barriers and attaining sublimity. The lover in these poems reaches beyond the natural materialistic concerns of life and perceives love from a totally different perspective.

The lover's apprehensive anxiety on the welfare of his sweetheart and the recurrent repercussions of his involvement; his reverie reflecting the reverent regard for his beloved; his desire to be destroyed with the hope of exuding the aroma of love; his triumphant measures to satiate his love's distress; his perception of love as an invincible power; his self-relinquishment for the consummation of love; his prayer to be allowed to occupy the same pedestal as love; and finally his allegiance to love, heedless of his own existence; augment to the exaltation and elevation of love beyond the transcendental restrictions.

#### 3.4.1 The Fear of Love:

The lover desires to devise designs to fortify his sweetheart from the mundane turmoil of flattery that sacrilegiously contaminate her bloom; and insulate her from the covetous appraisals. He intends configuring a camouflaged, occluded and inviolable sanctum for his sweetheart wherein greedy Time and Destiny would not be able to enter; and she would be safe. The lover is submerged in apprehension that in order to wipe off the much preserved elegance and ecstasy on his sweetheart's face, the immeasurable recurring greed/lust is being inflamed or reinforced. Disheartening forlornness about roving winds and rays of sunlight unearth the secret of the tempting and bewitching eyebrows and breath; and convey canards to entice Death. Finally the lover is in a dilemma as to how he would be able to promise his sweetheart a refuge; when his own love of her wouldn't be able to protect her from the ravenous and sooty fire of his desire to possess her.

#### 3.4.2 The Illusion of Love:

This verse triggers the thoughts of how important a sweetheart is to the lover. Though people talk of love as being a momentary, fleeting flash of fluttering flame in an earthen lamp; the lover disregards it; because to him, it was love that kindled and ignited his gloominess and brought forth invincible radiance of daylight. The common saying in the world is that love is a shell thrown onto the shore as a fluke; but it least bothers the lover as it bears the infinite music of Time. Lastly, popular belief is that love is a perishable thing that falls a victim to Death; defaced and mutilated by Fate; but even this does the waver the

thoughts of the lover, who believes it to have been a divine spectacle enabling him envision the sanctum sanctorum.

### **3.4.3 The Worship of Love:**

This verse divulges the reverential attitude of the lover towards love; and his inclination to be squashed in an impressive grip of his sweetheart. He desires to be squeezed like a fragile lemon leaf or the blossom of a tulasi plant; emanating a lingering fragrance of the memory of love like the wind that wanders around at sunset. The reminiscences of love are gratifying as the harmonious euphonies of winds at dusk. The lover is eager to be scorched in the flame of love. The imagery used by Sarojini Naidu is that of the incense that is set fire to; for the aromatic perfume it emits during prayer time. Just as the substance that emits the fragrance is destroyed; the lover also craves to allow his soul to effuse fragrance that continues to linger around until the evening star is baffled by it and acknowledges the passion of the lover's love.

Sarojini Naidu's use of similes is a distinctive quality that enshrines her poetry. The similes she uses attract the readers to her intense imagination, elegance of thought and expression. The Indianness of the comparisons employed stir irascible indigenous impressions.

### **3.4.4 Love Triumphant:**

The lover professes his love for his sweetheart by proclaiming his intention of defending her in the face of dreadful vengeance being wreaked against her by Destiny. Even if she is dampened with a mysterious anguish; or if her hands are blemished with murderous sinfulness; or if her charming fleshy part of the body disintegrates; the love borne by the lover compensates and screens her from the deluging dread and detest. Heedless of the pestilence or offence; derision of men or retribution of Time; the lover emphatically states that the suffering he underwent in his life was of no small measure and that he was ready to cope with the above mentioned. He was sure he could afford his sweetheart comfort, relief and repose in his bosom; by quietening her distress.

### **3.4.5 Love Omnipotent:**

The lover declares himself ready to take upon himself anything for the sake of his sweetheart. Though his hands are feeble, her command would enable him gain dauntless energy whereby he would fasten dawn and night; he would quash and flatten mountains like sea-shells; he would squeeze the moon like a flower; siphon off rivers like dew drops; snatch and strip sunbeams like arrows and stars like eyeballs. He wouldn't hesitate to accomplish anything at her behest. Her disposition would pleasantly bestow upon him an audacity that could capacitate him to conquer and calm the contumacious cyclone into singing like a bird; to flex and forge the fleet-footed flashing flare into a tiara on her forehead; to unmask Time and its concealed victories and spread it out like a rug for his sweetheart; and tear apart the silence of the dead.

The use of Hyperbole by Sarojini Naidu wherein the lover speaks of accomplishing impossible, impractical and unachievable tasks at his sweetheart's bidding brings to fore the

propensity of admirers, devotees and enthusiasts. The tone of the lover herein depicts his recklessness in the process of impressing his mistress.

### **3.4.6 Love Transcendent:**

When the world comes to an end and the time of the Final Judgment arrives; God is prepared to listen to the misdeeds of every individual. Every soul occupies its ordained place; while the lover's sweetheart is anointed as a saint, perfectly perfect and crowned on the throne that is closest to God. The lover also, then dead, would not be forgiven for his amorous passion, which he shamelessly cherished; he would be condemned eternally and flung far away from the heights of Paradise. His solitary journey down aeons is made fearlessly. The pace of his descent would be savoured and embellished with the delightful reminiscences of his sweetheart's glowing face. Though flung through times and sufferings, the lover promises to gladden the hearts of the dead by eulogising his sweetheart's name. His only desire is to secure his sweetheart's place in Paradise; regardless of he remaining a banished fugitive, not seeking any clemency.

### **3.4.7 Invocation:**

The lover implores his sweetheart not to stoop down from her glorified position where she shines pure and serene; but to plainly attempt to raise his striving spirit from the earth. He requests her persistent anger to reconcile itself to the severe trial and demolish and re-assemble his heart and intention. Her contempt for him was like burning heights he is forced to climb; her sorrow borne by her head was a crown agonising to wear and the lover's head is weighed down by it; her prosecuting muteness remained his daily dose of nutrition. Finally the lover is hopeful that his incessant craving will attain sanctity and salvation from humanly vanity thereby attaining redemption and re-birth; entitling him to a place by her.

### **3.4.8 Devotion:**

In the last poem of this octet the lover surrenders himself to his sweetheart. He remains unmindful of whether she uses his flesh to feed her dogs; or his blood to water her garden; or transform the ashes of his burnt heart into dust – as he remains her possession and she was at liberty to treasure him or terminate him. She had the privilege to choose from throttling his soul and tossing it into fire or burning him into ashes in the flame of hell he would under no circumstances waver, worry or revolt; but always remain a delicate thought in her heart.

## **3.5 SUMMARY**

**“Some people feel the rain;  
Others just get wet.”**

**JOHN KEATS**

Sarojini Naidu's poetry offers us a stimulating and scintillating portrait of her multi-dimensional personality. Though fragile physically, she possessed an indomitable spirit. The most prominent positive trait of Sarojini Naidu's character was that she was an extrovert who

was open minded to new vistas. Sarojini Naidu cannot be called a feminist; but she struggled for their upliftment. She loved spring season and the bounties offered by nature. Her political life in no way could smother the nature-lover in her. It did neither boost her chances as a poet nor condemn them. She managed her roles as a poet, wife, mother and political leader discretely and efficiently. She was conferred with the gold medal “Kaiser-i-Hind” for poetry. She was initiated into the Royal Society of Literature and conferred with an honorary doctorate degree by Allahabad University.

Her recognition as an Indo-English poet has reached an extent where, just her poetic output alone may successfully identify Indo-English poetry. Her publication “The Golden Threshold” was widely covered by the British Press. Her three poems “The Soul’s Prayer”, “In Salutation to the Eternal Peace” and “To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus” were identified specially and provided a distinctive place in the Oxford Cambridge History of English Literature.

Just as a coin has two sides to it; so also does Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. She, no doubt, provides us with a vision of nature, love and spring; but the canvas is restricted to romantic feelings, ecstasy, flora and fauna – all on the brighter side. Profound feelings and thoughts are not to be found. No realistic depiction is to be seen. Intellectual vigour is absent. It is colourful, aromatic and melodious. The depth and expanse found in S.T. Coleridge’s poetry is not present. Though this cluster of love poems “The Temple” are an expression of passionate feeling and idealisation of love; the touch simply scrapes superficially. These poems are an assertion of beliefs in life and express a despairing or depletive disposition; but do not reveal any reflective power or intellectual quality. In spite of her shortcomings, she is the most read and admired poet.

Reading Sarojini Naidu is like experiencing the rain. It is a delightful affair. She showed a kaleidoscopic world – rich in texture, bright in vision and beautiful in expression. Her aestheticism at reminiscing the nostalgic emotions of love and the ecstasy therein substantiate the point

**“Nothing ever becomes real; till it is experienced”**

**John Keats**

### **3.6 TECHNICAL TERMS**

The Gate of Delight – The Path of Tears – The Sanctuary – Love – Transcendent – Aestheticism – Reminiscences – Hyperbole – Simile – Imagery – Nostalgia – Indigenous – Ecstasy – Omnipotent – Triumphant – Illusion – Worship – Invocation – Devotion – Guerdon – Menace – Silence – Sorrow.

### **3.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. How does the central theme of the series provide a common platform for the three octets?
2. How does the perception of love vary from verse to verse?

3. How do the titles 1) The Gate of Delight 2) The Path of Tears and 3) The Sanctuary help in understanding the theme of each of the series?
4. What do you think is the overall idea of the poet towards love?
5. How are the three octets similar yet different?

### **3.8 REFERENCE BOOKS:**

1. "The Temple" by Sarojini Naidu
2. "The Gate of Delight" by Sarojini Naidu
3. Knowledge ::Builders of Modern India :: Sarojini Naidu
4. Sarojini Naidu – Poet – Biography.com

**DR. K. SRILATHA,**

## LESSON 4

# NISSIM EZEKIEL

### OBJECTIVE

After going through the lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand about Nissim Ezekiel in Indian Writing in English
- Analyze Identity of Nissim Ezekiel as a literary writer
- Critically examine his poems prescribed for your study, *Poet, Lover, Bird watcher* and *Enterprise*.

### NISSIM EZEKIEL

Modern Indian Poetry in English after Independence owes its identity to Nissim Ezekiel. Some critics regard him as the father of Modern Indian poetry. A magazine describes his biography as,

“scion of a modestly bourgeois Jewish family, a generation or two removed from the traditions of rural village life; a young writer living on the margins of a great European empire in dissolution, he returned to his native city after a sojourn in the metropolis; bound to his city by complex ties: work, loves, family, and the intimate knowledge of a culture to which he would always be to some degree an outsider”.

Nissim Ezekiel was born on 14 December 1924 in Mumbai. His father, Moses Ezekiel, was a professor of Botany at Wilson College, and his mother was Principal of her own school. They belonged to Bombay Jewish community, known as the ‘Bene Israel.’ In 1947 Ezekiel took his MA in English Literature from Bombay University. Then he studied philosophy at Birbeck College, London. He married Daisy Jacob in 1952 and the same year his first collection of poems titled *A Time to Change* was published by Fortune Press (London). Returning home Ezekiel joined *The Illustrated Weekly of India* as an assistant editor in 1953 and stayed there for two years. He published his second book of verse *Sixty Poems* the same year. He also worked as a broadcaster on arts and literature for All India Radio. He worked in the Department of English in Mithibai College, Mumbai from 1961 to 1972. He rendered his service as visiting professor at University of Leeds (1964) and University of Chicago (1967).

Of his return to Bombay, he wrote in English, in “*Background, Casually*” (1965):

I have made my commitments now.  
This is one: to stay where I am,  
As others choose to give themselves  
In some remote and backward place.  
My backward place is where I am.

He said, simply, that he could write in no other language than English, a logical enough corollary of his father’s being headmaster of an English-language secondary school. (His mother taught in another school, speaking Marathi, which for centuries had been the language of Bene Israel Jews.)



Ezekiel's poetic collections include: *Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (1974), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982), and *Collected Poems 1952-88* (1989). Among the honours Ezekiel received are: the Sahitya Akademi award in 1983 and the Padma Shri in 1988. He was Professor of English at University of Mumbai during the 1990s. He acted as the Secretary of the Indian branch of the PEN. After a prolonged battle with Alzheimer's disease, Nissim Ezekiel died in Mumbai, on 9 January 2004.

### Themes:

The major themes of Ezekiel are: love, loneliness, lust, creativity and political pomposity, human foibles and the "kindred clamour" of urban dissonance. The young man who went after dreams, demanded truth and lambasted corruption. After 1965, he even began embracing India's English vernacular, and teased its idiosyncrasies in *Poster Poems* and in *The Professor*. Ezekiel is averse to obscurity in modern poetry. As he puts it:

Attacks on obscurity in poetry are generally dismissed as anti-intellectualist. But there still remains a case against always giving obscurity and difficulty the benefit of the doubt on the ground that some profound truths can be expressed in no other way. Too many poets in the twentieth century offer only the difficulty and not the profundity, though it is not considered respectable in literary circles to say so. Modern writers have a tendency to justify the complexity of their writing on the ground that modern life is complex. However, the complexity can be presented in deceptively simple form, as sometimes the profoundest philosophical truths are presented. (qtd. in Ramakrishna 27)

Of the critics who have taken more than a passing interest in Ezekiel, Makarand R. Paranjape traces a strong, coherent spiritual dimension in his poems. Curiously, he asserts that Ezekiel's spirituality is "more Hindu than Jewish." Perhaps the critic's own cultural grounding predisposes him to read Ezekiel as a Hindu poet, but to this reader Ezekiel's questioning of his own motives as a poet and his implicit veneration of creation as a holy act, as well as his mordant sense of his own minor role in the human comedy, are Jewish to the core.

Ezekiel's father (like Kafka's) had distanced himself from Jewish practice. Despite this, and even though the poet set himself apart from the majority of his fellow Bene Israel Jews, who largely chose immigration to Israel in the decades following Partition and Indian independence, Nissim's Jewish identity was never in doubt in his poetry. He writes in "Jewish Wedding in Bombay":

The Sabbath was for betting and swearing and drinking.  
Nothing extravagant, mind you, all in a low key  
and very decently kept in check.  
My father used to say,  
these orthodox chaps certainly know how to draw the line  
in their own crude way. He himself had drifted into the liberal  
creed but without much conviction, taking us all with him.

My mother was very proud of being 'progressive'.

Makarand Paranjape notes, quoting lines from Ezekiel's first published poems, "Always he is a 'man aspiring /To the Good, which may be God' and the way is 'Prayer and poetry, poetry and prayer'." Ezekiel was to assert in a later poem, "Prayer," that "Indifference /Alone is unredeemable. /The rest is faith, belief and truth /Pursued, at any rate, in prayer. /This is all I know of prayer."

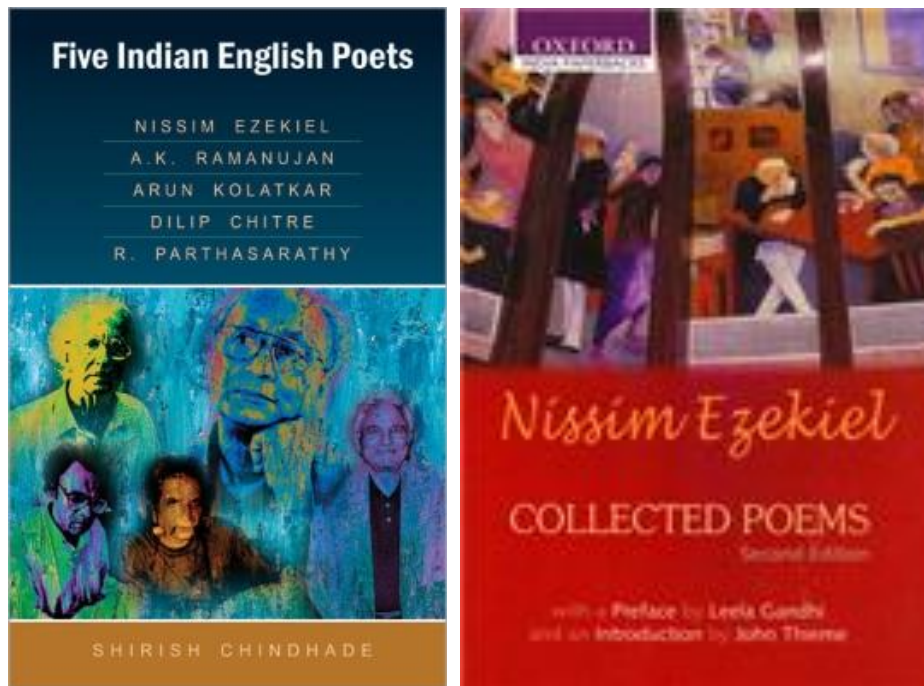
When he began his writing career in the late 1940s, his use of formal and correct English was criticized, given its association with colonialism. After 1965, he began experimenting with exaggerated 'Indian English'. Ezekiel, being a member of the Indian Jewish community, approached poetry as an outsider and was different from the nationalistic Indian literature of that time. Most of his poetry was that of the urban India, issues of alienation, love, marriage and sexuality. He acted as a mentor to younger poets, such as Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawalla and Gieve Patel. In the last few years of his life, he was deeply involved in helping Mumbai poets, his advice being forthright, but seldom blunt. Ezekiel is highly optimistic in his poetry. There is no atmosphere of dejection. Even though life is full of sorrows and problems one aspires to live a happy life. In the words of Shreedhar Gautam:

Ezekiel rejects Dejection because poetry is central to his life. Unlike many other poets, he brought a sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry. He is unique also in terms of his craftsmanship and purposefulness. Nissim sees life as quest for wholeness, for intellectual and spiritual satisfaction, for maturity. His poems show his desire to be away from distraction and obsessions of worldly life; but it is grounded in the physical and social reality. The major concern in his poem is how to live happily, calmly, and ethically as an integrated human being despite having to face so many personal difficulties and depressing moments.

Ezekiel portrays the lives of both the extremes in the society. The negative features of the lower strata as well as the elitist world of five-star hotels make contents for his poems. The poet's songs, in their finely tuned observation of his own sensibility and his links to the world around him—Bombay—flow from this substrate, the grounding in Jewish culture that he owns and recognizes. In *Declaration*, published in London in 1952, the poet observes:

"Obedience to a comprehended law is freedom, peace and power. Creation moves in submission tirelessly. Unyielding men are broken by the hours." Tracing this theme of obedience through his work, we come to Ezekiel's "Concluding Latter-Day Psalm" in his last collection of poems, *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982): "Now I am through with /the Psalms; they are /part of my flesh."

As one of the Bene Israel who decided to stay behind in India after the birth of the State of Israel, Ezekiel and his family belonged to a remnant of a remnant. "My ancestors, among the castes, /were aliens crushing seed for bread," he recollects in "Background, Casually." The Bene Israel preserved the story of their origins: seven men and an uncertain number of women, shipwrecked somewhere in the northern reaches of the Konkan coast of western India. No one came looking for them, so there they stayed and made their lives, oil-pressers turned rice and coconut cultivators and fishermen on the coastal fringe of the great Arabian Sea that had nearly swallowed their ancestors.



There are surely thousands of stories yet to be told of the Bene Israel who made the decision to emigrate (some to South Africa—most to Israel) after Partition. There were odd cases, like that of Fayzee Rahamon, the Bene Israel court painter to two generations of Muslim princes of Janjira, Nawab Sidi Ahmed Khan and his son Nawab Sidi Mohammad Khan III. (Another Bene Israel, Shalom Bupaji Wargharkar, had held the post of chancellor in the nawab’s court at the end of the 19th century.) In the end, the Jewish painter married a Muslim princess, converted to Islam, and emigrated to Karachi at the invitation of Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Nissim Ezekiel’s story is just as rare, if truer to his origins. A “Saturday Oil-Presser” (translation of the Marathi label for his ethnicity, the day mentioned being the day his ancestors would not press oil) speaking as the dominant voice of “Indo-Anglian” poetry in the first decades of an independent India, he taught in Bombay colleges and worked as an art critic for the most English of Indian dailies, *The Times of India*, as well as leading India’s section of P.E.N. for many years and writing plays. He taught abroad twice, invited to lecture first at the University of Leeds and then at the University of Chicago. The *Journal of South Asian Literature* of the University of Chicago dedicated an issue to him in 1976.

In commenting on the writing of another Indian outsider, V.S. Naipaul, Ezekiel wrote in “Naipaul’s India and Mine,” 1965: “In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness 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.

When I was eighteen, a friend asked me what my ambition was. I said with the naive modesty of youth, ‘To do something for India.’ ”

In a passage from Ezekiel’s review of Naipaul’s *Area of Darkness*, Ezekiel calls himself “incurably critical and sceptical,” in regard to himself and to India. He observes that his critical posture “does not prevent the growth of love.” He follows that declaration with a

sadder, somewhat wistful note that “critical, sceptical love does not beget love.” In “Minority Poem,” Ezekiel observes (apparently of the Hindu majority): “I lack the means to change /their amiable ways, /although I love their gods. /It’s the language really /separates, whatever else /Is shared. It’s not the mythology /or the marriage customs /that you need to know, /It’s the will to pass /through the eye of a needle /to self-forgetfulness.”

### 1.1 PRESCRIBED POEMS

Now read the poem *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*, prescribed for your study.

#### POET, LOVER, BIRDWATCHER

To force the pace and never to be still  
Is not the way of those who study birds  
Or women. The best poets wait for words.  
The hunt is not an exercise of will  
But patient love relaxing on a hill  
To note the movement of a timid wing;  
Until the one who knows that she is loved  
No longer waits but risks surrendering -  
In this the poet finds his moral proved  
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.

The slow movement seems, somehow, to say much more.  
To watch the rarer birds, you have to go  
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow  
In silence near the source, or by a shore  
Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor.  
And there the women slowly turn around,  
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light  
With darkness at the core, and sense is found  
But poets lost in crooked, restless flight,  
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.

#### INTERPRETATION:

Read the poem again and arrive at an interpretation. Do remember that the interpretation given below is only a perspective. Your interpretation is as valid as mine provided you give examples from the text to substantiate one’s point of view. ‘Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher’ is a popular poem which says that, ‘the best poets wait for words’: the best poets begin to write poetry only when they are truly inspired or when they experience a moment of illumination or enlightenment, only then do the right poetic words come to them.

This waiting is not so simple. The poet cannot while away his time, but like the careful birdwatcher, has to remain ever alert. The gift of poetry comes at the cost of eternal vigil. The poets have to remain poised in that state of tension. ‘To force the pace’ is to compel oneself to make haste. ‘Never to be still’ is never to remain motionless, but to be always on the move. ‘Or women’ are of those who study women and those who pursue the women they love, it is not only require a lot of patience but also forbearance capacity to bear undetermined time.

‘The hunt’ is the search for birds or the desire to win a woman’s heart, it requires patience. It is highly pain taking job. In case of love, a person has to wait for his beloved’s reply. Those who do not have patience may not become successful in their love. “Until the one who knows that she is loved’ is for the man to wait for the woman to respond to his love out of her own accord, and should not force himself upon her. One who fails to remain silent during the process, may fail to achieve the favour of woman.

‘In this the poet finds his moral proved, Who never spoke before his spirit moved’: In the examples of the bird watcher and the lover, the poet would find the right parallels and would be able to draw a moral for his own guidance.

The ‘deserted lanes’ are the untrodden pathways where one can see rare birds. ‘Remote and thorny like the heart’s dark floor’ is the simile used obscurely and probably means the unexplored depths of human heart, just as there may be faraway and distant seashores with thorny bushes that are inhabited by rare birds. The idea of labour and hard-work is implied here with regard to a bird watcher in search of rare birds and to a poet in search of the right words. ‘And there the women slowly turn around, not only flesh and bone but myths of light’: Only after undergoing an arduous journey may the lover get some response from the woman. The woman then becomes for him not just a being of flesh and blood, but appears as a radiant spirit which is not so much real, but mythical and imaginary.

She is no longer a mere physical presence. The poet has thus glorified love as well as the woman who eventually responds to a man’s love.

‘With darkness at the core’ is the centre of the woman’s personality which is shrouded in darkness even after she has been transformed into a radiant spirit; she still continues to be a mystery or an enigma. ‘And sense is found by poets lost in crooked, restless flight’ refers to the poets find meaning and significance in things even when they have been puzzled and perplexed earlier, like a bird which has lost its way; this illumination comes only after patiently waiting for the right moment. A third element which is that of love is also introduced in the poem. Courtship, bird watching and poetry, thus become related. In each case, the attitude that is recommended is of passive alertness, not of anxiety, hurry, aggression, or hyper-activity. The more one is agitated, the less one gains. The one who is loved is not pursued like a quarry, but watched with such intensity and patience that she ultimately risks surrendering. There is no action, no exercise of will, in a poet, a lover, or a birdwatcher, but patient waiting itself a strategy in order to achieve the goal.

This is about learning to be a poet. Lover and birdwatcher are the templates from which the poet has to learn his craft. This poem meditates on the interconnections between the vocation of a poet, a lover, or birdwatcher. The interconnected images in the poem explain each vocation – running after a rare bird and the right word is as uncertain and risky a proposition as successfully winning over a girl.

An image starts out referring to one and then goes on to embrace the other two activities. The first section opens with a reference to ‘pace’ which is taken up in the second section by ‘slow movement’. The iambic pentameter lines reinforce the idea of steady pace. All three are hunters, we are told: ironically none are going to devour what they succeed to hunt. The quest motif implies the necessity of learning.

If the poet does not push his desire to write a poem and waits for the right words, persists in his search for the right sense and sound, the poet can succeed in producing a good poem. In this the poet should learn the patience of the birdwatcher who trails the birds into remote places, silently, waits to get that one view which creates something ethereal: myths of light. Or the poet should be like a lover who patiently woos, but is dedicated to the woman, who will surrender only after having drawn the lover across ups and downs in the process of wooing. But when he succeeds he has not only her persona but her soul: bringing an ethereal joy, myths of light. So should a poet persist in his/her quest for the right words to be able to write a poem that is not crooked or restless, but ethereal: myths of lights.

There is no action, no exercise of will in the three cases, but patient waiting is itself strategy, a kind of planned action to reach the goal. The hunt is search for birds or the desire to win a woman's heart. Patient love relaxing on hill is to assume an attitude of patience and relaxation while watching birds or women. A timid wing is a transferred epithet where the idea of a bird being timid is suggested. Until the one who knows that she is loved is for the man to wait for the woman to respond to his love out of her own accord, and should not force him upon her. In this poem poet finds his moral proved, who never spoke before his spirit moved.

At the end of his wait, the poetic word appears in the concrete and sensuous form of a woman, who knows that she is loved and who surrenders to her lover at once. In this process, poetry and love, word and woman become intertwined. But this slow movement of love and poetry which shows no irritable haste to arrive at meaning does not come by easily. In order to possess the vision of the rarer birds of his psyche, the poet has to go through the deserted lanes of his solitary, private life; he has to walk along the primal rivers of his consciousness in silence, or travel to a far off shore which is like the heart's dark floor. The poet, then, gloats on the slow curving movements of the women, both for the sake of their sensuousness and the insight they bring.

All three are hunters, we are told: ironically none are going to devour what they succeed to hunt. The poem conducts a lesson through comparisons between the three poets, lover and birdwatcher. Poet is placed first in the title and in the poem he comes last. The differentiated placement is suggestive of who is learning and who becomes a lesson. Lover and birdwatcher are illustrative cases for the poet to learn the craft of poetry. The last two lines of both the sections indicate that the moral to be learnt is for the poet. The poem is well-structured poem in two regular stanzas having the rhyme pattern a b b a a c d c d d in each of them. It has a casual, conversational opening with a direct address to the poets, urging them to patiently wait for words as does a birdwatcher for birds and a lover for his ladylove.

The idea of labour and hard-work is implied here with regard to a bird watcher in search of rare birds and to a poet in search of the right words. 'And there the women slowly turn around, not only flesh and bone but myths of light': Only after undergoing an arduous journey may the lover get some response from the woman. The woman then becomes for him not just a being of flesh and blood, but appears as a radiant spirit which is not so much real, but mythical and imaginary. She is no longer a mere physical presence. The poet has thus glorified love as well as the woman who eventually responds to a man's love.

Courtship, bird watching and poetry are related and in each case, the attitude that is recommended is of passive alertness, not of anxiety, hurry, aggression, or hyperactivity. The more one is agitated, the less one gains. The one who is loved is not chased like a quarry, but

daring. Ultimately, the rewards of such worshipful patience are great: what is gained is not just” flesh and bone but myths of light/ with darkness at the core”:

“And there the women slowly turn around,  
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light  
With darkness at the core, and sense is found  
But poets lost in crooked, restless flight,  
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.”

For Ezekiel, love and poetry are means to a special knowledge, wisdom and transcendence. There is a major miracle that the two bring about: “The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight”. Poetry, then, like love, is ultimately a different way of perceiving reality of seeing, hearing and experiencing differently.

A typical feminist reading of the poem misinterprets the poem as the inherent patriarchal authority that lives within the poem and which is generally a reflection of the poet’s attitude also. They object women to be birds of prey or loving to hunting. The poem, in fact, is no male centric; it is about art of living and art of writing. Nissim has a modernist bent of mind and his *Poet, lover, Birdwatcher* is a modern poem. It is not a simple or unitary phenomenon, but a rather complex set of attitudes and idioms. Here in this poem is a precise use of language, especially of well crafted images, and their largely ironic stance.

## 1.2 PRESCRIBED POEMS

Now read the poem *Enterprise*, prescribed for your study.

### ***ENTERPRISE BY NISSIM EZEKIEL***

It started as a pilgrimage  
Exalting minds and making all  
The burdens light, The second stage  
Explored but did not test the call.  
The sun beat down to match our rage. 5

We stood it very well, I thought ,  
Observed and put down copious notes  
On things the peasants sold and bought  
The way of surpants and of goats.  
Three cities where a sage had taught 10

But when the differences arose  
On how to cross a desert patch,  
We lost a friend whose stylish prose  
Was quite the best of all our batch.  
A shadow falls on us and grows . 15

Another phase was reached when we  
Were twice attacked , and lost our way.  
A section claimed its liberty  
To leave the group. I tried to prey .

Our leader said he smelt the sea 20

We noticed nothing as we went ,  
A straggling crowd of little hope,  
Ignoring what the thunder ment ,  
Deprived of common needs like soap.  
Some were broken , some merely bent. 25

When, finally , we reached the place ,  
We hardly know why we were there.  
The trip had darkened every face,  
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.  
Home is where we have to gather grace.30

## INTERPRETATION

Read the poem again and arrive at an interpretation. Do remember that the interpretation given below is only a perspective. Your interpretation will be valuable provided you give examples from the text to substantiate one's point of view. Ezekiel describes the account of a journey in the poem 'Enterprise'. A section of people endeavour on a journey to achieve a specific goal. Their sheer initiative, and the thought of their objective leave them keyed up .They proceed on their expedition and the sun shines its scorching rays on them. Nevertheless, they render themselves immune to the stinging rays and put up an enduring front. The leader of the group believes that they have withstood the heat well. They take notes of whatever they see in the course of the journey. They observe the things they find around, and the commodities that the peasants sell and buy and witness the behaviour of serpents and goats. Besides, they behold the sight of three cities where a sage has delivered his learned discourses.

The travellers fall into an argument over how to cross a desert. Owing to the differences, a person who wrote stylish prose and is supposed to be the best of the group forsakes the rest and goes his own way. The others are left with a sense of deprivation.

The travellers go through another ordeal as they are attacked twice and lose their way. At this juncture, many of the travellers leave the group and go on their own way. The poet asserts that on occasions like these he strived to seek solace in God, while the leader mentioned that they were near to the sea. Nevertheless, the travellers find themselves unmoved by anything they witness. They perceive nothing stimulating them anymore, and ignore the significance of the thunder. The thunder reminds us of Eliot's "Wasteland", where it signifies fertility and productivity. Further, they divorce themselves from even basic amenities such as soap. Some of the group are totally overcome with fatigue and they become too stressed to bear with the pressure of the journey any more.Eventually, the travellers do reach their destination point. Nevertheless, when they do finally reach their target, they comprehend that their achievements have neither been far-fetched nor singular: 'Home' is the ultimate place that they have to discover grace.

The journey at once becomes a metaphor for life. In the rat race of competition, principles and ethics are quite often side-stepped. We live life to achieve some prescribed goal. However, as we carry on, we tend to become so obsessed with the target that the means does not matter at all: the End is only important. Besides, the poet echoes that in the race to



be successful, people have lost the inner meaning of life, and live life only on the topographical or superficial level. People have forsaken the simple joys of life; they tend to ignore life's basic experiences/teachings. The spiritual enigma of life is not a matter of concern for them. 'Home' or self-discovery resides within each individual. It is primarily subjective, and not objective. The journey itself is the destination.

The poem 'Enterprise' is written in a conventional form. The poem consists of six stanzas, each having five lines. The pattern is iambic tetrameter, with rhyming scheme ababa that is the first line rhymes with the third and fifth, while the second rhymes with the fourth. The poem has used verbal antithesis to achieve a balance. Antithesis is a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases, lines or stanzas. In this poem, verbal antithesis is not only found in the entire poem but in the same stanza and in the same lines.

The initial activities of the pilgrims are juxtaposed with those in the final stage as the pilgrims turn into 'a straggling crowd of little hope.' The 'exalted minds' of the pilgrims are turned into 'darkened faces.' In the beginning the pilgrims found themselves as the 'burdens light' but at the end of the poem they are broken in spirit and bent down physically.

'Enterprise' is a symbolic poem. Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to represent ideas or facts. Pilgrimage in the poem symbolizes 'life'. The 'crowd of pilgrims' symbolizes a group of men, who undertake to achieve common goal which begins with excitement and hope but ends with disillusionment and frustration. The 'Sun' is the symbol of hostility of nature towards human aspirations and ambitions. A 'desert patch' is symbolic of the challenges and hardships which the group faces or the differences that rise among them.

'Thunder' is symbolic of man's inner voice. 'Home' symbolizes remaining rooted to the soil or remaining true to oneself.

Allegory can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. The poem 'Enterprise' is allegorical in nature. The group of men all set for the journey, enthusiastic and full of vigour set out for the spiritual quest. They face hardships, difficulties yet they do not lose their aspirations. But during the second stage of their journey, disharmony and differences in opinions among the members arises and soon a conflict breaks out which results in disunity.

The final stanza raises a question, 'Was the journey worth all the struggles?' The journey here is a metaphor of life. The poem is a stark depiction of the condition of men on this earth who are subjected to such failures, hardships and disillusionment during their course of journey of life.

An epigram is a brief, sharp, witty and polished saying giving expression to a striking thought. It is used to convey the poet's message in the poem. 'Home is where we have to gather grace' is epigrammatic. Here, the poet wants to convey the message that in the journey of life, home is symbolic of one's inner self which must be accepted and faced and not shirked away. This is the only sane and balanced way of life that man should accept.

Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel is a satiric poem with a moral. It deals with pilgrimages which serve no useful purpose. The poem contains the two central metaphors of his poetry – pilgrimage and home – according to him, to please God one need not go on pilgrimages as He is within. Obviously, without faith and unity of purpose, God can never be reached.

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## LESSON 5

# SMALLSCALE REFLECTIONS ON A GREAT HOUSE

### OBJECTIVE

After going through the lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand about A. K. Ramanujan in Indian Writing in English
- Analyze multilayered consciousness of Ramanujan as a literary writer
- Articulate the characteristics of A. K. Ramanujan's poetry

### STRUCTURE

- 5.1 A. K. Ramanujan
- 5.2 Contributions to South Asian Studies
- 5.3 Controversy Regarding His Essay
- 5.4 Ramanujan's Poetry
- 5.5 Major works of A.K.Ramanujan
- 5.6 Online sources
- 5.7 Reference Books

#### 5.1 A. K. RAMANUJAN

A.K. Ramanujan(Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan) (Mysore City, India, 1929 - Chicago, July 13, 1993) was a Indian poet, translator, scholar and author, a philologist, folklorist and playwright. His academic research ranged across five languages: Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Sanskrit, and English. He published works on both classical and modern variants of these literatures and also argued strongly for giving local, non-standard dialects their due.

He was born into a traditional family in Mysore City on 16 March 1929. His father, Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami, a professor of mathematics at Mysore University and an astronomer, had a study crammed with books in English, Kannada and Sanskrit. The house was alive with ideas. On summer nights, the children gathered on the third floor terrace while their father pointed out and explained the constellations. Sometimes at dinner, the children listened intently as their father translated for their mother the stories of Shakespeare and other Western classics into Tamil.

Ramanujan's mother was an orthodox Brahmin woman of her time, limited by custom in the scope of her movement and control, in this way a typical housewife. Though she was no intellectual practitioner, she was neither typical nor limited in her learning and imagination. She was widely read in Tamil and Kannada, and comfortable in the world of ideas. By the time his father died, when Ramanujan was only twenty, the older man had already helped shape his son's devotion to an intellectual life.

As a youth, Ramanujan was perplexed by his father's seemingly paradoxical belief in both astrology and astronomy: how could one man blend the rational and irrational in this way? Curiously, Ramanujan chose magic as his first artistic endeavor. While in his teens, he

had the neighborhood tailor fashion him a coat fitted with hidden pockets and elastic bands in which he concealed rabbits and bouquets of flowers. With added accoutrements of top-hat and wand he performed in local schools, women's groups and social clubs. The desire to be a magician was perhaps a strange use of the insight he gained from his father's quirky belief in the irrational.

### **Education**

He was educated at Marimallappa's High School and Maharaja College of Mysore. In college, Ramanujan majored in science in his first year, but his father, who thought him 'not mathematically minded', literally took him by the hand to the Registrar's office and changed his major from science to English. He was a Fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958 - 59 and Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University in 1959 - 62. He was educated in English at the Mysore University and received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from Indiana University.

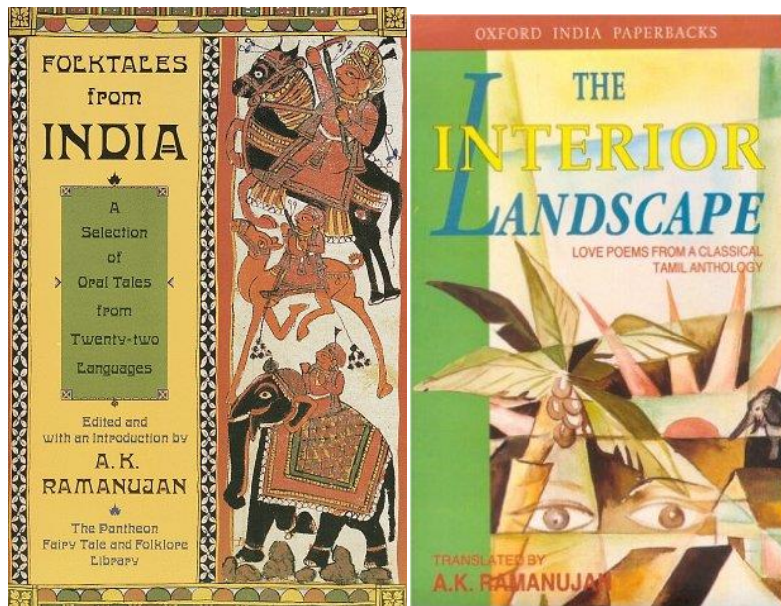
### **Career**

Having been a lecturer in English at Quilon and Belgaum, he taught at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda for about eight years. In 1962, he joined the University of Chicago as an assistant professor, where he was affiliated throughout the rest of his career, teaching in several departments. However, he did teach at several other U.S. universities at times, including Harvard, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and Carleton College. At the University of Chicago, Ramanujan was instrumental in shaping the South Asian Studies program. He worked in the departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Linguistics, and with the Committee on Social Thought.

In 1976, the government of India awarded him the title Padma Shri, and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship (Shulman, 1994). In 1983, he was appointed the William E. Colvin Professor in the Departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, of Linguistics, and in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and, the same year, he received a MacArthur Fellowship. As an Indo-American writer Ramanujan had the experience of the native milieu as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems like the "Conventions of Despair" reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the east and the west. A. K. Ramanujan died in Chicago, on July 13, 1993 as a result of an adverse reaction to anesthesia during preparation for surgery.

## **5.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES**

A. K. Ramanujan's theoretical and aesthetic contributions span several disciplinary areas. In his cultural essays such as "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1990) he explains cultural ideologies and behavioral manifestations thereof in terms of an Indian psychology he calls "context-sensitive" thinking. In his work in folklore studies, Ramanujan highlights the intertextuality of the Indian oral and written literary tradition. His essay *Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections* (1989), and his commentaries in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967) and *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991) are good examples of his work in Indian folklore studies.



To Ramanujan translation is an art of immense labour for the purpose is: “to carry across”. He did his best to follow the directives of Dryden to whom translation was a sacred service to a text:

- to keep as near my author as I could, without losing all his graces, the most eminent of which are the beauty of his words and these words, I must add, are always figurative... taking all the materials of this divine author. I have endeavoured to make (him) speak such English as he himself would have spoken... in this present age.

(“Introduction”, Hymns for the Drowning, translation A. K. Ramanujan.)

Ramanujan hails a translator as “an artist on oath”. According to him to translate is to “carry across”. In the preface of *The Interior Landscape* the first book of Tamil translations he describes the sanctity of the task of translating:

- Anyone translating a poem into a foreign language is at the same time trying to translate the foreign reader into a native one.

### He further adds:

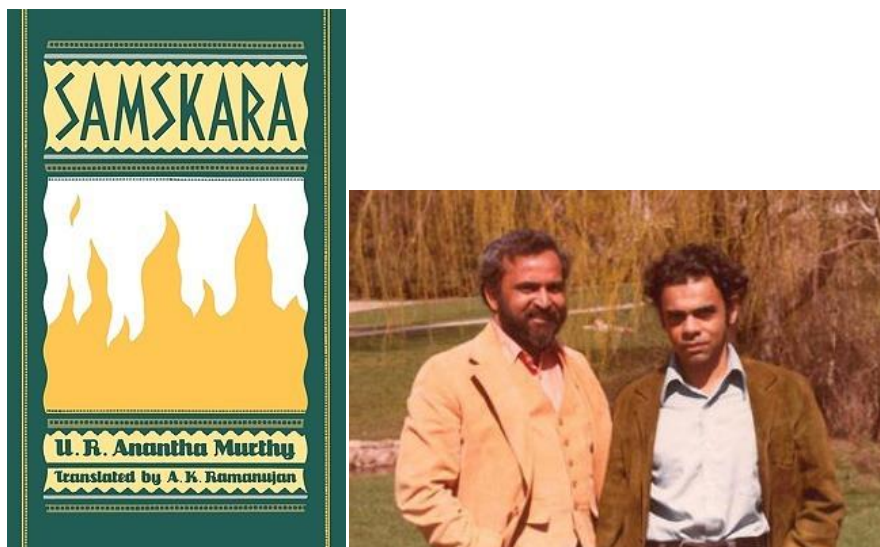
A translator has to be true to the translation no less than the original. He cannot jump off his shadow. Translation is a choice, interpretation, an assertion of taste, a betrayal of what answer’s one’s need.(*The Interior Landscape*, 11-12.)

### 5.3 CONTROVERSY REGARDING HIS ESSAY

His 1991 essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations* courted controversy over its inclusion in B.A., History syllabus of Delhi University. It was included in 2006. In this essay, he had written about the existence of many versions of the Ramayana and a few versions portrayed Rama and Sita as siblings, which contradicts the popular versions of the Ramayana, such as those by Valmiki and Tulsidas.

Ramanujan's critical work in Indian folklore and translations of Indian classical literature is highly regarded around the world and taught in colleges in India and the U.S. His essays, such as *Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?* take theoretical approaches from linguistics, in better understanding cultures, religious influences and ways of thinking, via a context-sensitive approach. Ramanujan is considered to be one of the cornerstones of Indo-American poetry, with his poems being an exploration and testament of immigrant life along with the reminiscence and preservation of his Indian culture. His foremost contribution to South Asian Studies consists of his theory of Indian way of thinking as "context-sensitive" as opposed to Anglo-American "context-free" way. He explains this different kind of rationale by the different tradition in India. As appropriateness in India is defined by a multitude of factors such as identity and personhood, birth, occupation, life stage, karma, dharma, etc, according to him, context sensitive approach is what Indian complex set of standards demands. Girish Karnad in his speech on Ramanujan recollects his literary bond:

You have just seen my documentary, Kanaka-Purandara. The commentary for the film draws heavily on the Introductions he wrote to his two collections of Kannada and Tamil Bhakti poems. My film, Cheluvi, is based on a Kannada folk tale which he had collected ('The Flowering Tree'). When I was at the University of Chicago and asked to write a play for the students, I didn't have to look far. I looked through his anthologies of oral tales, chose two, and combined them to concoct Naga-Mandala, which is my most oft-produced play in the US. I got interested in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Kannada vacana literature because of him. I based my play, Taledanda, on the events of that period guided by Ramanujan, and when I translated the play into English, I used his translations of the vacanas... You know, I am sure, of the akshayapatra. It refers to a pot which never gets empty however generously you help yourself to its contents. Ramanujan was an akshayapatra to me.



(U.R. Anantha Murthy with A.K. Ramanujan)

In 1976, the government of India honored Ramanujan with the prestigious Padma Shri, one of its highest civilian awards, for his significant contributions to Indian literature and linguistics. In 1983, he was awarded the MacArthur Prize Fellowship. In recognition of the excellence of his translations, the South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies has established the A.K. Ramanujan Book Prize for Translation. He won posthumously (1999) Sahitya Akademi award for *The Collected Poems of A. K. Ramanujan*.

Ramanujan passed away on July 13, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois, as a result of an adverse reaction to anesthesia during preparation for surgery.

**Walter houser writes:**

In the quiet yet affable wit known best to his extended family of students, colleagues and friends, Ramanujan would observe that he was the hyphen in the phrase 'Indo-American'.

But to everyone who knew him and the passionate brilliance of his language, he and his poetry were rather a richly evocative metaphor for the human experience wherever it might be found.

**5.4 RAMANUJAN'S POETRY**

The Striders. London: Oxford University Press, 1966

Hokkulalli Huvilla, No Lotus in the Navel, 1969

Relations. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971

Selected Poems. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976

Mattu Itara Padyagalu and Other Poems, 1977

Second Sight. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986

The Collected Poems of A. K. Ramanujan, 1995

Uncollected Poems and Prose (Oxford India Paperbacks), 2005

**Translations and Literary Studies:**

- The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology, 1967  
Speaking of Siva, 1973
- The Literatures of India. Edited with Edwin Gerow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974
- Samskara. (translation of U R Ananthamurthy's novel) Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976
- Hymns for the Drowning, 1981
- Poems of Love and War. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985
- Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages, 1991
- "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" in India Through Hindu Categories, edited by McKim Marriot, 1990
- When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others (with Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman), 1994
- A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India, 1997

**Ramanujan's Work Translated:**

- Poems and a Novella: Translated From Kannada, 2006, A. K. Ramanujan (Author), Tonse N. K. Raju (Translator), Shouri Daniels-Ramanujan (Translator).

- This book contains a translation of Ramanujan's Kannada novella Mattobbana Atma Charitre (Someone Else's Autobiography) and the poetry collections Okkulalli Hoovilla (No Flower in the Lotus), Mattu Itara kategalu and Kuntobille (Hopscotch).

### 5.5 MAJOR WORKS

- Sociolinguistic Variation and Language Change (with W. Bright), 1964
- Speaking of Siva, 1973
- The Literatures of India, 1974
- The Epic of Palnadu: A Study of Translation of Palnati Vinula Katha, a Telugu Oral Tradition from Andhra Pradesh, India, 1982
- The Indian Oedipus, 1983
- Two Realms of Kannada Folklore, 1986
- Introduction In Indian Folktales 1987
- The Relevance of South Asian Folklore, 1987
- Where Mirrors are Windows: Toward an anthology of reflections, 1989
- Classics Lost and Found, 1989
- Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?, 1990
- Three hundred Ramayanas, 1991
- Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages, 1991
- Toward a Counter-System: Women's Tales, 1991
- A story in search of an audience, 1992
- On Folk Mythologies and Folk Puranas, 1993
- Some Thoughts on 'Non-Western' Classics, with Indian Examples, 1994
- The collected essays of A.K. Ramanujan, 2004

### 5.6 ONLINE SOURCES

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-a-k-ramanujan-1488285.html>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.\\_K.\\_Ramanujan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._K._Ramanujan)

<https://projectindianpoetry.wordpress.com/mip/poets/a-k-ramanujan/>

### 5.7 REFERENCE BOOKS

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- Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan. Ed. Vijay Dharwadkar. 1st ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 34-51.
- 2001. "The Ring of Memory: Remembering and Forgetting in Indian Literature". Uncollected Poems and Prose: A.K. Ramanujan. Ed. Molly Daniels-Ramanujan and Keith Harrison. 1st ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 83-100.



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**DR.N.USHA RANI**

## LESSON 6

# A RIVER - A.K.RAMANUJAN

### OBJECTIVE

After going through the lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyze various influences on A. K. Ramanujan's writing
- Critically examine his poems prescribed for your study
- Small Scale Reflections on a Great House
- A River.

### STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Poems prescribed
- 6.2 Small-scale reflections on a Great house
- 6.3 A River
- 6.4 Interpretation of the poem
- 6.5 Conclusion
- 6.6 Comprehension check questions
- 6.7 References

#### 6.1 PRESCRIBED POEMS

Now read the poem *Small Scale Reflections on a Great House*, prescribed for your study

#### 6.2 SMALL-SCALE REFLECTIONS ON A GREAT HOUSE

Sometimes I think that nothing  
that ever comes into this house  
goes out. Things that come in everyday  
to lose themselves among other things  
lost long ago among  
other things lost long ago;

lame wandering cows from nowhere  
have been known to be tethered,  
given a name, encouraged

to get pregnant in the broad daylight  
of the street under the elders'  
supervision, the girls hiding  
behind windows with holes in them.

Unread library books  
usually mature in two weeks  
and begin to lay a row  
of little eggs in the ledgers

for fines, as silverfish  
in the old man's office room

breed dynasties among long legal words  
in the succulence  
of Victorian parchment.

Neighbours' dishes brought up  
with the greasy sweets they made  
all night the day before yesterday  
for the wedding anniversary of a god,

never leave the house they enter,  
like the servants, the phonographs,  
the epilepsies in the blood,  
sons-in-law who quite forget  
their mothers, but stay to check  
accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces,

or the women who come as wives  
from houses open on one side  
to rising suns, on another

to the setting, accustomed  
to wait and to yield to monsoons  
in the mountains' calendar

beating through the hanging banana leaves  
And also anything that goes out  
will come back, processed and often  
with long bills attached,

like the hooped bales of cotton  
shipped off to invisible Manchesters  
and brought back milled and folded

for a price, cloth for our days'  
middle-class loins, and muslin  
for our richer nights. Letters mailed

have a way of finding their way back  
with many re-directions to wrong  
addresses and red ink-marks

earned in Tiruvalla and Sialkot.  
And ideas behave like rumours,  
once casually mentioned somewhere  
they come back to the door as prodigies

born to prodigal fathers, with eyes

that vaguely look like our own,  
like what Uncle said the other day:

that every Plotinus we read  
is what some Alexander looted  
between the malarial rivers.

A beggar once came with a violin  
to croak out a prostitute song  
that our voiceless cook sang  
all the time in our backyard.

Nothing stays out: daughters  
get married to short-lived idiots;  
sons who run away come back

in grand children who recite Sanskrit  
to approving old men, or bring  
betel nuts for visiting uncles

who keep them gaping with  
anecdotes of unseen fathers,  
or to bring Ganges water  
in a copper pot  
for the last of the dying  
ancestors' rattle in the throat.

And though many times from everywhere,  
recently only twice:  
once in nineteen-forty-three  
from as far as the Sahara,

half -gnawed by desert foxes,  
and lately from somewhere  
in the north, a nephew with stripes

on his shoulder was called  
an incident on the border  
and was brought back in plane

and train and military truck  
even before the telegrams reached,  
on a perfectly good  
Chatty afternoon (1971)

### **Interpretation:**

Ramanujan's second book of poems entitled *Relations* evokes very intimately his memories of his parents, grandparents, cousins and other relatives. These poems establish his inseparable bond with the proximal and distal relatives whom he had left behind in India.

Ancestral houses, cousins, village roads, papaya trees, banana leaves, the Gita, the Ganges, create an enveloping ethos that suffused his English Poetry written in states with the flavours of India. The collection is infused with richly telling images and metaphors.

Ramanujan depicts his family life in poems like *of Mothers among other things*, *Love Poem for a wife I*, *Love Poem for a wife II*, *Small Scale Reflections on a Great House* owe their origin to the recollected personal emotions. This collection also explores his 'Childhood', the experience of love and the contemporary urban life. Along with two strains of love may be also noticed – union and separation and attachment and alienation. Above all the poems result in a forceful meaningful utterance. *Small Scale Reflections on a Great House* was first published in 1971. In his nostalgic reminiscence of his old family house, he communicates a vivid drama of his childhood in an ancestral house. The house is said to possess an incorrigible property of letting anything into its confine without allowing it to go back. The Indian culture has forever accommodated whatever had arrived at its threshold. It has incorporated all foreign elements into its internal structure to form a homogenous whole.

The repetition of the phrase “lost long ago” points to the loss of its true essence. The use of the present tense highlight the ‘presentness of the past’, how the past and present are intricately linked to each other.

On the surface, the poem is a customary catalogue of things that come into the Great House but do not go out and also an equally bizarre list of things that go out but soon come back. The poem slowly assumes a universal significance when the reader ponders on this enigmatic poem. He/she will then recognize that the poem is an elegy on the death of human dignity and identity. Things that once found their way into the house lost themselves, among other things in the house that had also been lost long ago. Therefore, this projects the antiquity, rich heritage and innumerable elements the culture encompasses. In a world, where human beings are marginalized, irrational creatures are accepted and provided with an identity (name); as with the intruding cow. The poet also mocks at the so-called taboos about natural things in Indian culture. For instance, the mating of the cows that girls of the house were carefully shielded from. Library books once borrowed from libraries never found their way back. Knowledge (books) that once entered into the heritage, formed a king of amalgamation of information refusing to die away. The diversity of festivals and plurality of religion is referred to in phrases like “the wedding anniversary of some God.” Gramophones continued to remain there. Music was an inherent part of Indian culture.

Owing to poverty and the lack of proper amenities, diseases that once entered the household continued to haunt the scenario, appearing as if there was no permanent cure to it.

It may also refer to the wide-spread prevalent superstitions that exist like a congenital deformity or hereditary disease in the Indian society. Sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, that once entered the threshold of the house never left it. In the Great House things and humans are all clubbed together:

They come in every day  
to lose themselves among other things  
lost long ago among  
other things lost long ago.

Ramanujan has no compunction to club together things and human beings in the list of things that come into the Great House but do not go out such as: straying cows, library books, dishes, servants, phonographs, epilepsies, sons-in-law and women who come as brides! Among the things that go out, but soon return are daughters who come back as widows and sons and nephews who come back as corpses slain in distant battlefields. Why do daughters soon return as widows? Ramanujan gives the cryptic answer: they were married to "short-lived idiots"!

This poem is more than a piece of criticism of an over-crowded south Indian household. It has a universal significance. When human beings lose their dignity and identity, they are little better than cows, dishes, bales of cotton and gadgets like phonographs. This vision of Ramanujan conveyed through this poem exalts it to the niche reserved for the greatest poetry in world literature. The Indian culture has always welcomed Western and Eastern elements, as a marriage of cultures. The sons-in-law teaching arithmetic exemplifies that alien cultures have imparted a lot too, in the form of knowledge and technology. Bales of cotton were carried off to Manchester in the UK, and these bales returned processed as packets of cloth with heavy bills attached to them. India has forever been a source of rich raw materials to the West.

What an uncle once communicated to a visitor, was repeated by some other visitor to the family, who had no idea that these ideas were initially conveyed by an uncle of the same family. Certain aspects of knowledge and methods had their original roots in India. Though now in a different form, they are communicated back as though something alien. For instance, Sanskrit is the root-base for most of the languages in the world, especially English as in 'I am' for 'aham' etc. The tradition also picked up crude things on the way, like the beggar's hoarse song, for instance. The negative alien things once that entered the household were also warmly welcomed, because once they entered, they were our own. Sons that had long ago left, leaving the soil came back in the form of their hybrid zones. They returned for the smell of their roots, for the smell of their blood.

On a poignant note, the poet ends the poem by mentioning that a boy who once ran away returned as a corpse that had been half-eaten in the Sahara in the year 1943. Certain attributes that leave does return, but in a deadened form. The nephew who had left the house to join the army, returned as a dead body. He had been killed in the course of a clash between the country's border security force and that of the neighboring country's security forces.

Clashes and conflicts may kill the person, but it can never kill the nationalism and patriotic fervour. As Gandhi once said: "A nation's culture resides in the hearts of the people." Ramanujan is a universal poet who can turn the ordinary and the ephemeral into the significant and the permanent.

### 6.3: A RIVER

In Madurai,  
city of temples and poets,  
who sang of cities and temples,  
every summer  
a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand,  
baring the sand ribs,

straw and women's hair  
clogging the watergates  
at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them  
the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun  
The poets only sang of the floods.

He was there for a day  
when they had the floods.  
People everywhere talked  
of the inches rising,  
of the precise number of cobbled steps  
run over by the water, rising  
on the bathing places,  
and the way it carried off three village houses,  
one pregnant woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.

The new poets still quoted  
the old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,  
kicking at blank walls  
even before birth.

He said:  
the river has water enough  
to be poetic  
about only once a year  
and then  
it carries away  
in the first half-hour  
three village houses,  
a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda  
and one pregnant woman  
expecting identical twins  
with no moles on their bodies,  
with different coloured diapers  
to tell them apart.

#### 6.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

Read the poem again and arrive at an interpretation. Do remember that the interpretation given below is only a perspective. Your interpretation is also valid provided

you give examples from the text to substantiate one's point of view. To understand the multiple meanings of a poem, readers must examine its words and phrasing from the perspectives of rhythm, sound, images, obvious meaning, and implied meaning. Readers then need to organize responses to the verse into a logical, point-by-point.

Ramanujan's first volume of poetry, *The Striders* (1966) is concerned with the nature of the human body and its relation to the world at large. This slim collection has elegant poems like *The Striders*, *Snakes*, *Breaded Fish*, *Two Styles in Love*, *No Man is an Island*, *Still Another for Mother*, *Lines to a Granny*, *A River and Lac into Seal*. The signature poem illustrates the modern man's concern with the self; *Still Another for Mother* and *Looking for a Cousin on a Swing* expresses emotions like anxiety, fear and sexuality. *A River* and *A Hindu to His Body* unfurls the various pictures of the Indian life and culture. These poems evoke both psychological as well as philosophical themes.

The poem's title refers to the river Vaikai which flows through Madhurai, a city known as the seat of Tamil culture for about two thousand years. The poem evokes the river beautifully but it also becomes a point of departure for contrasting the relative attitudes of the old and the new Tamil poets who are exposed for their callousness to suffering as a result of the floods. It is also a satire on the sensation loving poets who write only for events which excite them, such as floods, unmindful of the havoc and suffering which they cause among the people. The poet satirizes the absence of human concern in these pots:

but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her  
kicking at blank walls  
even before birth.

The poet's tone is casual and detached but his irony is pungent as he refers to the comment of the one who "was there for a day/ when they had the floods." The poem is remarkable for its vivid visual imagery and presentation of the minute details with photographic clarity.

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

Ramanujan's concern in these poems has been with his family, relations, past of India and our rich heritage. There is a tone of nostalgia running parallel so as to locate 'a communal past', which had demarcated the society into smaller sections. The images in the poetry reveal the stagnation of the poet's culture and the unidentified persona in his poems represent sterility. It revives the image of modern man with rootlessness. Ezekiel's words are rich echoes of tribute to his aesthetic skill:

- enriched the Indian- English tradition of poetry in a perceptible way" (The Illustrated Weekly of India(43-45.)

## 6.6 COMPREHENSIVE CHECK QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the symbolism in A.K Ramanujan's poetry.
2. Write a note on the character sketches of A.K Ramanujan's poetry.



3. Do you agree with the statement *ARiver* is the best poem written by A.K Ramanujam. If so why? Justify your answer with suitable reasons.
4. Highlight the theme of *Small-Scale Reflections on a GreatHouse*? Also comment on the use of poetic devices.

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**DR.N.USHA RANI**

## LESSON 7

# HOME COMING- SECTIONS 1, 3 & 4.

### OBJECTIVES

The aim of Parthasarathy's poem "Homecoming" portrays a picture of his native state, Tamil Nadu as he returns from his sojourn abroad. The main objective of the poem is that he has had a variegated career ranging from teaching to editing and the ambience of his poetic world has also been varied as he has moved from place to place, from Srirangam to Bombay, to Madras, to Delhi, to England and back.

### STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Homecoming : The text
- 7.3 Summary
- 7.4 R. Parthasarathy's literary contribution to English literature
- 7.5 Technical words/ Key words
- 7.6 Self-assessment questions
- 7.7 Suggested readings

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Rajagopal. Parthasarathy is one of the two major voices in Indian English poetry, from South India. He has had a variegated career ranging from teaching to editing and the ambience of his poetic world has also been varied as he has moved from place to place, from Srirangam to Bombay, to Madras, to Delhi, to England and back. The disturbing and moving experiences he has had, from this extreme mobility, form the matrix of his poetry making it primarily a poetry of experience.

**Rajagopal. Parthasarathy** (born 1934) is an Indian poet, translator, critic, and editor. Born in 1934, at Thirupparaithurai near Tiruchirapalli, Parthasarathy experienced the first trauma of transplantation when he moved to Bombay to be educated in Don Bosco and later in Bombay University. He worked as a lecturer in English in Ezekiel's department at Mithibai College, Bombay. This is the period Parthasarathy is referring to as "He had spent his youth whoring/after English gods". He was a British Council Scholar at Leeds University where he worked for a diploma in English studies.

The year 1963-64 in England was significant for Parthasarathy as it proved to be a culture shock — "My encounter with England only reproduced the by-now familiar pattern of Indian experience in England: disenchantment" ("Whoring After English Gods") This 'disenchantment', however, was extremely productive as it brought forth some of the finest poems in Indian English poetry on cultural encounter. ('Poems of Exile' — 1963-66). Giving up teaching, Parthasarathy entered publishing and joined Oxford University Press as its Regional Editor in Madras and later moved over to Delhi. At present, Parthasarathy is in New York State. Parthasarathy's other interests include music, film, theatre and painting. Of late, Parthasarathy is emerging as a bilingual writer and more importantly, as a translator of Tamil and Sanskrit writings into English.

He has edited a number of anthologies of poetry, and significant among them are *Poetry from Leeds* (1968) and *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (1976). He started writing poetry at the age of 16 and has published widely in journals in India and abroad, in *Encounter*, *London Magazine*, *Poetry India*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *New Letters* and his poems are included in many anthologies. He won the Ulka Poetry Prize of Poetry India in 1966.

Parthasarathy is also a discerning critic. His very selective prose tracts like “Poet in Search of a Language”, “Indian English Verse: The Making of a Tradition”, “Notes on Making of a Poem”, “and “How it strikes a Contemporary: The Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan” form part of Indian literary criticism in English. Statements like “A poem ought to, in effect, try to arrest the flow of language, to anaesthetize it, to petrify it, to fossilize it” and “the poet by sheer dedication to words, arrives at a truth which may otherwise be impossible for him to attain” or “poetry is an ascetic art, doing without, rather than’ doing with, indulgence” have become almost axiomatic.

Parthasarathy is the most reticent of Indian poets. The poems written over a period of 15 years have been put together in one volume *Rough Passage*, which is the most neatly and deftly structured poetic sequence in Indian English poetry. Parthasarathy is a conscientious and fastidious craftsman who revises his poems constantly. “He is the legendary workman who roughs out, cuts and sets his form as a sculptor would extract his art from his material”. (Saleem Peeradina) Parthasarathy thinks in images and his poems become memorable, individual images.

“A cow stands  
in the middle combing the traffic”  
“a storm of churches breaks about my eyes”  
“Painstakingly a wind  
thumbs paragraphs of bright sea.”

The prose piece “Whoring after English Gods” provides the background, “the historical and personal circumstances in which the poem (*Rough Passage*) eventually came to be written” as well as “the terms of reference”, Parthasarathy tells us. The various thematic strands are the social commentary, (“the epitaph of the Raj”) the poet’s cultural and linguistic predicament, search for the ‘roots’ and the poet’s problem of craft — how to make poetic use of the past, particularly the memories of the complex South Indian family network with its telescopic relationships. No other Indian poet has explored his linguistic dilemma so thoroughly and so painfully as Parthasarathy has. Understandably, there is a pervasive wistfulness in Parthasarathy’s poetry.

In his relentless self-enquiry and the confessional mode of expression Parthasarathy resembles Robert Lowell and *Rough Passage* is, like Lowell’s *Life Studies*, the honest record of the growth of a poet. The strength of Parthasarathy’s poems “derives”, as he himself puts it, “from his responsibility towards crucial personal events in his life”.

As the title suggests, *Homecoming* is about R. Parthasarathy coming home after spending sometime abroad, but he is not able to fit himself in the current scenario culturally, linguistically, sociologically and psychologically. The poem builds on the idea of the poet feeling exile and isolated, in spite of familiar things that surround him.

## 7.2 THE TEXT

### Homecoming

*Rajagopal Parthasarathy*

I am no longer myself as I watch  
the evening blur the traffic  
to a pair of obese headlights.

I return home, tried,  
my face pressed against the window  
of expectation. I climb the steps

to my flat, only to trip over the mat  
Outside the door. The key  
goes to sleep in my palm.

I fear I have bungled again.  
That last refinement of speech  
terrifies me. The balloon.

Of poetry has grown red in the face  
with repeated blowing. For scriptures  
I, therefore, recommend

the humble newspaper: I find  
My prayers occasionally answered there.  
I shall, perhaps, go on.

Like this, unmindful of day  
melting into the night.  
My heart I have turned inside out.

Hereafter, I should be content,  
I think, to go through life  
with the small change of uncertainties.

## 7.3 SUMMARY

R. Parthasarathy's single poetic output *Rough passage*, divided into three sections entitled 'Exile', 'Trial', and 'Homecoming', voices the experience of an entire nation. *Rough passage* does not intend to arrive at any ultimate statement about life, death truth, art and time. It merely aims at illustrating an experience pattern, by catching it alive and in its fullness. Parthasarathy is ambivalent throughout *Rough passage* basically because he is extra-sensitive. He approaches life and culture with inflated expectations and is therefore, subsequently disillusioned. And in this disillusionment lies the seed of his alienation.

Parthasarathy opens the poem by sharing his linguistic instability or inability. He accepts that his tongue is been tied by English and he is not fluent with Tamil, as he returns after his sojourn abroad.

He expects people to speak good Tamil, as used in good old Tamil literature and scriptures. His expectations are in vain and his hopes vanish, when he hears people use Tamil that is spoken by the characters in celluloid world or cinema.

His association with English appears to be like imprisonment as he wrestles with English chains. His mother tongue is emblematic of his rich Dravidian heritage that he cherishes. In his chains, that disable him to move freely, he falters, he stumbles.

At the time of Thiruvalluvar, the language was a sign of rich cultural heritage. He senses that the language has begun to deteriorate now, as it is adulterated.

In the present situation, the language is like a dead animal, infested with fleas at Kodambakkam.

This “carcass” of the language cannot provide the poet with the tradition he is seeking. Nammalvar was a famous Tamil Vaishnavite poet, a devotional hymnologist of the Eighth Century A.D. His verses formed part of the much-celebrated Nalayira Divya Prabandham.

The bull refers here to the Tamil language which Nammalvar handled with ease.

The present poets do not look for the richness of the past literature for inspiration. Rather, they look up to foreign writers as idols. Genuine models thrive in their own roots, and native speakers must therefore refrain from imitating alien culture.

The poet travels down the memory lane of his childhood when his father used to narrate to him the celebrated poem “Nalayira Divya Prabandham” before going to bed. The poet’s father used to pinch him when he wavered in his attention. The father was sincerely determined to instil in him the literary and cultural values through his recitation of the classic.

After grandfather’s death, they held a ceremony where all the relatives were reunited. They came in crowded buses loaded with dust of many years of memory. They recognized each other immediately. The relatives gather in groups and sit without much formality. They eat the packed food they have brought for lunch.

He recognizes a girl named Sundari, who he had known during his childhood days and had climbed up and down forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt every morning with the poet. She is married now and has three daughters clinging to her like three floating planets. The poet cannot relate himself with his relatives and with the circumstances.

The poet then says that he has become an expert in farewells. When his father died on a November, it was unexpected and a huge hit on him. He and his relations stood in shock as they watched the fire engulf his father’s body.

### **Conclusion:**

The agony of ‘home coming’ to the language and its culture is excruciating. The language and the culture, both are debased. Yet the poet has to come to terms with them in order to realise himself, as a person and a poet.

## 7.4 R. PARTHASARATHY'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTION TO ENGLISH LITERATURE

R. Parthasarathy, a poet, translator, critic, and editor, teaches at Skidmore College. He is the author of *Rough Passage* (Oxford UP, 1977), a long poem, and editor of *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (Oxford UP, 1976). His translation into modern English verse of the fifth-century Tamil epic, *The Tale of the Anklet: An Epic of South India* (Columbia UP, 1993), has received many awards including the 1995 Indian National Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi) Translation Prize.

In order to understand the history of translation in India, we need to understand what the Hindus thought about the nature of language. The locus classicus is the following hymn from the Rig Veda:

*uta tvahpasyannadarsavacam,  
uta tvahsrnvannasrnotyenam.  
One who looked did not see the word,  
One who listened did not hear it (Rig Veda 10.71.4).*

The hymn emphasizes the fact that the Word is not revealed to everyone. The uninitiated have no access to it. It was a closely guarded secret by the Brahman priesthood. The Word was never written down; it was communicated only orally. For once it was written down, it was no more than a dead letter. It lost its sacred power and ceased to be a mantra. Under the circumstances, translation was an abomination. For how could the language of the gods, *deva-vani*, as Sanskrit was regarded, be translated into any human tongue? It was simply inconceivable. And so the Rig Veda was not written down until much later. In fact, for over 2,000 years it was orally transmitted—all of its 1028 hymns comprising about 21,200 lines—from one generation to another by priestly families, a process that has continued to this day. It is a phenomenon that has no parallel anywhere else. This explains why the Rig Veda had not been translated in its entirety into any Indian language until recently (I believe there are translations in Hindi and Kannada), although complete translations began appearing in the nineteenth century in French (1848-51), English (1850-88), and German (1876-77) a monument to Europe's fascination with Sanskrit.

Translators of the Vedas were regarded as traitors (*traduttoritraditori*, as the Italians say), who exposed the Word to the unholy ears of the Untouchables. But the European Indologists changed all that, even though Sir William Jones in the late eighteenth century found it almost impossible to find a Brahman to teach him Sanskrit. Jones was an Untouchable in the eyes of the Brahmans. I experienced no such problem from the English, Irish, and Scottish priests of the Salesians of Don Bosco who were more than eager to teach me English. They even arranged for me to study Sanskrit, even though the language was not taught at the school. I am grateful to them for this gift of tongues. Before enrolling in Don Bosco, I went to an elementary school where the medium of instruction was Hindi. To this day, I do my multiplications in Hindi. Therefore, with four languages to speak of Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi, and English—what else could I be except a translator? To make available in English a few of the masterpieces of Indian literature—that has always been my objective. And I am glad to report that the Tamil *Tale of an Anklet* now stands shoulder to shoulder with the major epics of the world.

Drawing upon my translations from the Tamil, Sanskrit, and Pali, I would like to share with you my thoughts on "Translation as an Afterlife." In the process, I will be talking

briefly about these languages and about the problems I encountered in making poets from these languages speak in English. Though it takes a poet to translate a poet, I must confess that at my back I often hear Shelley's despair about translation expressed memorably in his *Defence of Poetry* (1840): "It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principles of its color and odor, as seek to transfuse from one language to another the creations of a poet." The word "translate," as we know, comes from the Latin *trans*, "across," "beyond," and *latus*, "to bear" or "carry," therefore "a carrying across." And the Greek for translation is *metaphor*: *meta*, "beyond," and *phero*, "to carry," therefore "a carrying beyond."

Translation is the most intimate act of reading. To interpret his text to his audience, the translator must study the culture that has produced the text, and study it diligently and for a long time, so that he knows what the Sanskrit word *moksa* or the Tamil word *ananku* means (both words lack English equivalents) or what a bo tree, under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, looks like.

The texts that the paper will discuss are the Tamil *Cilappatikaram* [*The Tale of an Anklet*, 5th c. CE], the Sanskrit *Subhasitaratnakosa* [A Classic Anthology of Fine Verses, 11th c. CE], and the Pali *Therigatha* [The Songs of the Elder Nuns, 6th c. BCE]. Some problems of idiom, syntax, imagery, and tone will be examined in the course of making English poems from the Indian languages. The paper will also talk about the differences in the poetics of the Indian languages on the one hand and English on the other, and examine the implications those differences have for the translations.

## Tamil

Tamil, the oldest of the four major Dravidian languages, is spoken mainly in Tamil Nadu in south-eastern India. The language was regularized around 250 BCE. However, the earliest Tamil poetry goes back to a period between 100 BCE and 250 CE, and is found in numerous anthologies that were later gathered together in two great collections: the *Ettutokai* [The Eight Anthologies] and the *Pattuppattu* [The Ten Long Poems].

Throughout its history, Tamil Nadu was relatively isolated and free from the invasions that swamped the rest of the country, except for a brief Muslim interlude (1324-70 CE) in Madurai. Though the Aryanization of South India had been going on since the first millennium BCE, Tamil Nadu (and Kerala) were not united with the rest of India till the British period. Again, Tamil, among all the Indian languages, has resisted Sanskritization by preserving archaic features of phonology and morphology. As a result, the spoken and written forms are different from each other. Also, unlike other Dravidian scripts, Tamil orthography has resisted the inclusion of special characters for writing down Sanskrit sounds. The only exception is the *grantha* script that the Tamils used in writing Sanskrit.

For nearly two thousand years, the Tamil country in southern India has had a distinct culture of its own. Early Tamil literature speaks of the country as bounded by the Venkatam Hills (Tirupati) in the north, by the ocean in the east and west, and by the Kumari Hill (Cape Comorin) in the south. It consisted of the three Tamil kingdoms of the Cola, the Pantiya, and the Ceral. Two Greek works, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (1st c. CE) and Ptolemy's *Geography* (2d c. CE), mention the flourishing Roman trade with southern India, which the Tamil kings encouraged. Poets from Kapilar (2d c. CE) to Subramania Bharati (1882-1921) have sung the praise of the Tamil country. Ilanko is no exception. *The Tale of an Anklet* speaks for all Tamils as no other work of Tamil literature does: it presents them with

an expansive vision of the Tamil imperium, and embodies at the same time a concern for spiritual knowledge represented by the heroine Kannaki's apotheosis. No other work has endeared itself more to the Tamils than the unhappy tale of Kovalan and Kannaki. *The Tale of an Anklet* is the quintessential Tamil poem that in the words of Subramania Bharati "rends the hearts" ("*nencaiallum cilappatikaram*") of all Tamils. This is another reason why it has possessed their imagination for over fifteen hundred years as a staple in both its oral and written traditions, crossing generic boundaries, to be retold in verse, prose, fiction, drama, and film.

*The Tale of an Anklet* is one of the literary masterpieces of the world: it is to the Tamils what the *Iliad* is to the Greeks—the story of their civilization. Anyone interested in comparative religion will find it especially useful since it abounds in Jaina, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. It spells out the problems that humanity has been wrestling with for a long time: love, war, the inevitability of death, evil, and God's justice. It unequivocally admonishes us to "Seek the best help to reach heaven" (30.196-97), since life is unstable, and we cannot escape from our fate. Ilanko is, after all, a Jaina monk who renounces the world, and his perspective on the events in the epic strongly reflects his own spiritual bias. Epics from *Gilgamesh* (c. 2000 BCE) onwards have reflected on these problems.

The translation of *The Tale of an Anklet* into modern English verse is one way of acknowledging the debt I owe Tamil, my mother tongue. My assimilation of the eponymous author Ilanko is another form of translation—rewriting a poem in English that I could not myself write in Tamil. I envied Ilanko his great epic, and the only way I could possess the poem, make it my own, was to rewrite it in English. By making Ilanko speak in the accents of English, I hope, I have breathed life into the poem, and awakened it from its enforced sleep in Tamil. For a poem is firmly rooted in a language. When translated into another language, it is exiled from its own, but is no less a poem for the experience. The example from *The Tale of an Anklet*. Whatever its origins, Ilanko's Tamil was a not a spoken language. He appears to have embalmed the speech of the bards or *panans*, who orally kept alive the tradition of the story of Kovalan and Kannaki. The diction is elitist and courtly, which is perhaps understandable, as the realm of the epic's passage are the three kingdoms: the Cola, the Pantiya, and the Ceral.

## I.

karutturukanavarkantapi nalla  
tiruttalumillenirralumilanenak  
korravaivayirporrotitakarttuk  
kiltticaivayirkanavanotupukunten  
merricaivayilvariyepeyarkena (23.179-83).

The separation of the constituent elements in each line, and translate them. The virgules indicate phrase/ clause boundaries which are marked by Arabic numerals.

## II.

karuttu-uru kanavar kanta-pin allatu  
iruttalum illen nirralum ilan-ena-k  
korravai vay-ir pon-toti takarttu-k  
kil-t-ticai vay-ir kanavan-otu pukunten  
mel-ticai vay-il variyen peyark(u)-ena



**III.**

/[my] heart-has known [the] husband I have seen-after till/  
 /sitting there is no standing there is no/-/thus [Kannaki] vowed/  
 /[of] Korravai temple-in [the] [her] golden-bracelets breaki`ng//  
 [the] East Gate-through [my] husband-with I entered [this city]/  
 [the] West Gate-by// [and] grieved/ /I leave [now alone]/  
 This is how the lines appear in my English version.

**IV.**

Kannaki vowed:

"Till I have seen the husband  
 My heart has known; I will neither sit nor stand."

Her golden bracelets she then broke in the temple  
 Of Korravai, and wept:

"With my husband  
 I entered this city through the East Gate:  
 I now leave by the West Gate, alone" (23:185-90).

English has blurred the focus of the Tamil original as the latter's phonetic template has all but vanished. Despite all the erosion that has occurred in translation, I have firmly held on to Ilanko's voice, and anchored my English version to it. The voice often peaks as it does in the famous scene above where Kannaki leaves Madurai after burning it down.

Translation is a necessary rite of passage. Exiled from its own language, the poem puts down roots in the host language to begin its life as an immigrant in hopes of eventually becoming a native.

A language and nation remember themselves best in a poem. *The Tale of an Anklet* is the well of Tamil undefiled to which the Tamils return to witness their language and identity most vigorously asserted. In translating a poem, one translates nothing less than an entire culture with all its idiosyncrasies. Here is one. Traditionally, an Indian woman's life ends with the death of her husband. She removes the ornaments on her person, stops putting the *tilaka* on her forehead, and shaves her head to indicate her unholy status as a widow.

Kannaki finds herself in this limbo when she vows in the temple of Korravai, the goddess of war and victory, that she will not rest till she has seen her husband, and ceremoniously breaks her golden bracelets. Ilanko turns this gesture, dictated by tradition, into a resonant symbol: earlier, in canto 20, Kannaki confronts the king with his injustice, and in his presence breaks her anklet to establish her husband's innocence. The king collapses from the shock. So does his queen. And Madurai itself goes up in flames. Only then is Kannaki's wrath appeased. A woman's ornaments function metonymically as extensions of her power that even kings may not trifle with. The king rules only at the pleasure of his subjects. Such gestures, as Kannaki's, are culture-specific. There is no way a translator, short of erecting a babel of footnotes, can alert his English to them. But I want the poem to speak without choking itself on too many footnotes, though I appreciate the fondness some translators have for them.

**Sanskrit**

The word "Sanskrit" means "perfected" or "refined." The language was standardized from the spoken language by about 500 BCE. It is an inflected language like Greek and Latin.

It has, for instance, eight cases of noun inflection, and both nouns and verbs are inflected differently. This inflection allows endless variations of word order. Unaccented functional words in English, such as "the," "a," "with," and "at," are indicated in Sanskrit by a change in the inflectional syllable. Thus, for the three English words "of the book," Sanskrit has only one, "*pustakasya*," where the genitive singular marker "*asya*" represents "of the." Thus the inflected nature of Sanskrit makes possible an unusual tightness of construction. Also, the analysis of tropes or figures of speech in Sanskrit is based on poetry; in Greek and Latin, it was originally based on oratory. While Greco-Roman rhetoric focuses on the manner of presentation, Sanskrit poetics emphasizes imagery and tone. Nothing is explicitly stated. It is always suggested. Indirect suggestion (*dhvani*) is a fundamental aesthetic principle. The poems are impersonal. No names are mentioned, as any public acknowledgement would be socially disapproved and in bad taste.

Let us look at an example, "The Riverbank," from Vidyakara's *A Classic Anthology of Fine Verses* [*Subhasitaratnakosa*, 11th c. CE]. This is one of the few poems on infidelity, and it is by the incomparable Vidya, the foremost woman poet in Sanskrit.

drstim he prativesiniksanamihapyasmadgrhedasyasi  
 prayonaivasisohpitadyavirasahkaupirapahpasyati |  
 ekakinyapiyamidavaramitahsrotastamalakulam  
 nirandhrahstanamalikhantujatharacchedanalanagranthayah ||  
 Vidya, *Subhasitaratnakosa*

He can't stand well water, the child's father,  
 refuses to touch it.  
 Would you, neighbor, keep an eye on the house  
 while I slip out for a moment, alone as I am,  
 to the riverbank overhanging with tamalas  
 and spiked with bamboos that may prick my breasts  
 with their sharp, broken stems?

A wife, in the Indian tradition, is expected to be faithful to her husband. The poem subverts that expectation by referring to the wife's infidelity obliquely through the use of innuendo (*vyanjana*). The poet does not explicitly spell it out as it would offend social conventions. Indian erotic texts, such as the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana [4th c. CE], recommend the practice of scratching the body with nails during lovemaking. The woman anticipates the marks on her breasts as she sets out to meet her lover under the pretext of fetching water from the river for her husband. Eight kinds of nailmarks are identified: the knife stroke, the half-moon, the circle, the dash, the tiger's claw, the peacock's claw, the hare's jump, and the lotus leaf. Nailmarks are a prelude to lovemaking, and are therefore treasured as souvenirs. "If there are no nailmarks to recall the lover's presence," reminds Vatsyayana, "it means that passion has long since disappeared, and love has been overcome."

The task of the translator from Sanskrit into English is to try to bring across the intention of the poet. In Sanskrit poetics, the intention is a *rasa*, a transcendent emotion or state of being induced in the hearer, but inherent in the poem. The emotion is of course the transforming experience of love that knows no boundaries. It is in marked contrast to the restrictions that patriarchy imposes on women to conform to the social proprieties in writing. The line "and spiked with bamboos that may prick my breasts" is the only clue we are offered about the intention. A translator unfamiliar with ancient Hindu erotic practices will be unable to make sense of the poem.

Again, the translator must bear in mind that Tamil and Sanskrit were written to be heard. The ancient Hindus did not read with their eyes only but aloud, and it follows that the sound of a classical text is supremely important and ought not to be disregarded in translating.

It is precisely the imaginative universe of Vidya's Sanskrit poem that I have tried to bring across in English in all its breathtaking sophistication. I have not been able to resolve the problem with the "tamala" (*XanthochymuspictoriosaRoxb.*), a black-barked tree that grows on riverbanks, as I could not find an equivalent tree in English that grows along with the bamboo. So I have left the word untranslated.

## Pali

In contrast to Sanskrit, the "perfected" or "refined" language, there were many vernaculars known as Prakrits, the "original" or "natural" languages. One such Prakrit is Pali, the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures, the *Tipitaka*. Pali means "holy scripture," as opposed to commentary. Pali is a form of the ancient Paisachi language spoken in western India. In the first centuries after his death, the Buddha's sermons in Magadhi were translated into Paisachi, which later developed into Pali. Unlike Hindus, Buddhists had no qualms about translation. The Buddha encouraged his disciples to spread his teachings in their own dialects. Pali is still the religious language of the Theravada Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Southeast Asia.

Let us look at an example, "Song of a Former Courtesan" by Vimala, from the *Songs of the Elder Nuns* [*Therigatha*, 6th c. BCE] said to have been composed during the lifetime of the Buddha (ca. 563-ca. 483 BCE).

mattavannenarupenasobhaggenayasena ca |  
yobbanena c' upatthaddha anna samatimanni 'ham || 72 ||  
vibhuseva imam kayamsucittambalalapanam |  
atthasimvesidvaramhiluddopasam iv' oddiya || 73 ||  
pilandhanamvidamsentiguyhampakasikambahum |  
akasimvidhammayamujjagghantibahumjanam || 74 ||  
sajjapindamcaritvanamundasamghatiparuta |  
nisinnarukkhamulamhiavitakkassalabhini || 75 ||  
sabbe yoga samucchinna ye dibba ye ca manusa |  
khepetvaasavesabbesitibhutamhinibbuta || 76 ||

Vimala puranaganika, *Therigatha*

Young and overbearing—  
drunk with fame, beauty,  
with my figure, its flawless appearance—  
I despised other women.  
Heavily made-up, I leaned  
against the brothel door  
and flashed my wares. Like a hunter,  
I laid my snares to surprise fools.  
I even taught them a trick or two  
as I slipped my clothes off  
and bared my secret places.  
O how I despised them!

Today, head shaved, wrapped  
 in a single robe, an almswoman,  
 I move about, or sit at the foot  
 of a tree, empty of all thoughts.  
 All ties to heaven and earth  
 I have cut loose forever.  
 Uprooting every obsession,  
 I have put out the fires.

The songs were chanted. Each stanza (*sloka*) of the *Songs* comprises four verses (*padas*) of eight syllables each. The first two verses, divided by a caesura, form one line; the next two verses, again divided by a caesura, form the second line. Unlike the secular poets of Tamil and Sanskrit, the Pali Buddhist poets attempted to raise the language of their religious songs above that of the profane model. They deliberately shifted the emphasis of their songs away from the love poetry of the secular poets to the attainment of liberation (*moksa*), the true joy which, according to early Buddhist teachings, was granted only to the monk or nun meditating in a world of his or her own. The first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths is suffering (*dukkha*), and the cause of suffering is desire (*tanha*), especially sexual desire. One description of nirvana is the dying out of the fires of lust (*kama*), greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and illusion (*moha*).

Vimala, the former courtesan of Vesali, after her initiation into the Buddhist order of nuns realizes the impermanence of all things and is on her way to enlightenment. A contemporary of Sappho, her poem is an extraordinary spiritual testament unlike anything in the Lesbian poet. The song is a chant, and there is no way I could reproduce the prosody of the Pali original. So I settled for a vigorous, colloquial idiom spoken simply but passionately in five quatrains. The Pali word for "obsessions" in the last stanza is *asavas*, "the obsessions of the mind." Buddhism distinguishes four types: 1. the obsession with sensuality (*kamasava*); 2. the obsession with life (*bhavasava*); 3. the obsession with ideologies (*ditthasava*); and 4. the obsession of ignorance (*avijjasava*). The struggle for the extinction of these *asavas* is one of our primary duties. In his commentary on the *Therigatha*, Dhammapala of Kancipuram (5th c. CE) tells the story of Vimala's initiation into the order.

One day Vimala saw Moggallana, one of the Buddha's foremost disciples, in the streets of Vesali. Infatuated with him, she followed him to his house. There she turned on her charm and tried to seduce him, but was repulsed. Moggallana lashed out at her: "You bag of dung, tied up with skin. You demoness with lumps on your breast. The nine streams in your body flow all the time, are vile-smelling, and full of dung. A monk desiring purity avoids your body as one avoids dung." Vimala was speechless. The encounter was a turning-point in her life. She renounced her life as a courtesan, and became a Buddhist nun. Vimala's spiritual conversion can be explained in terms of the interdependence of the ascetic and the whore in Indian culture, which considers sexual desire an obstacle to enlightenment. Vimala flaunts her sexuality, and is proud of it. Her very identity depends on it. It empowers her to make fools of men for whom she has nothing but contempt. And yet she cannot do without them. Her survival as a courtesan depends on her ability to dispense sexual favours. In the end, she is filled with self-loathing and turns her life around to become a renouncer who has cut loose "All ties to heaven and earth." Free at last, she becomes an *arahant*, the "holy one," the highest stage reached by a Theravada Buddhist.

Translation is a way of reading a poem, of interpreting it in a second language. Given the differences between languages, not every feature of one language can be imitated by

another. Yet it is possible to establish a family resemblance. Eventually, the differences are only of secondary importance. For as Max Picard said: "Languages seem like so many expeditions to find the absolute word." Often a single poem may aspire to the status of the absolute word. Such a poem is the *Ramayana*.

A translation must first abolish the word in one language before it attempts, with the word, to restore it in another language. Languages orbit by themselves in splendid isolation. Occasionally, they come into close proximity with one another, thanks to the daring of a translator. Translation ensures the survival of a language, even if its speakers have vanished from the face of the planet.

## 7.5 TECHNICAL WORDS/KEY WORDS

**Home coming:** an instance of returning home.

**Abolish:** formally put an end.

**Translation:** the process of translating words or text from one language into another.

**Obese:** very fat or overweight.

**Humble:** having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's importance.

**Bungled:** carried out clumsily or incompletely.

## 7.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on Parthasarathy's life and works?
2. What is the central theme of the poem "Home coming"?
3. What is R. Parthasarathy's contribution to English literature?

## 7.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## LESSON 8

# CHITRA

### OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this lesson is to understand and appreciate the theme, characterization, and symbols in the play Chitra.

### STRUCTURE

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 About the play
- 8.3 The Legend
- 8.4 Theme
- 8.5 List of Characters
- 8.6 Scene-wise study
- 8.7 Symbolism in Chitra
- 8.8 Supernatural device
- 8.9 Character of Chitra
- 8.10 Character of Arjuna
- 8.11 Points to remember
- 8.12 Conclusion
- 8.13 Comprehension Check Question
- 8.14 References

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 in Bengal. He was the most outstanding writer in Bengali Literature of his time. He was a great sage, great poet and first Indian dramatist. He wrote poems, stories, novels, songs, dramas, and essays. Initially, Tagore established himself as a Bengali poet: and later, he was established as an English writer as well. He introduced new prose and verse forms. His English prose reveals him as an internationalist and a humanist preaching the gospel of universal harmony between man and man, man and nature, and man and the Divine. His works exhibit a positive attitude and are lyrical in nature.

In 1912 he went to England with *Gitanjali*, an English translation of some of his metaphysical lyrics. It was published by Macmillan, and acclaimed by W.B. Yeats, leading to his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. His prose writings in English were delivered as lectures outside India. *The Religion of Man* (1931) is an English prose work based on lectures delivered by him in 1930 at Manchester College, Oxford. The essays in the book read like extended prose-poem rather than lectures. His literary career extended to 65 years. He wrote the largest number of lyrics ever attempted by any poet. He wrote over 2,000 songs, which became central to the culture of Bengal, and they include the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. He took up painting towards the end of his life and exhibited his works in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, London and New York. He died in 1941. Next to Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, Tagore has come to be a great inspiration to millions in modern India.

Tagore exemplified the creative process as a self-renewing continuum under the mandates of man, nature and God. In 1920's and 30's he undertook extensive lecture tours of America, Europe and Far East. He travelled to more than 30 countries. The result of these tours enabled Tagore to turn his dreams into reality at Shantiniketan.

Tagore is known for his spiritually inclined mind. He was highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture to the west and vice versa. He has left behind him a great institution, the Visvabharathi at Shantiniketan. Shantiniketan is a boarding school cum ashram modelled on the ancient Indian tapovana (forest hermitage). Shantiniketan stands as a connecting thread between India and the world, for the study of humanity. It is a home for retirement and meditation, an ashram for cultural and spiritual realization. At the end of his life when ill health prevented him from travelling, he shifted his living place to Shantiniketan, next to his grand house called Uttarayan. He was a reformer, philosopher, prophet, novelist, short-story writer, and a critic of literature and life.

## **8.2 ABOUT THE PLAY**

Rabindranath Tagore's plays are basically expressions of the soul's quest for beauty and truth. Beauty is a principle that is wound round the emotion of love. Love is equivalent to all the wealth of the world. Beauty and love are the reiterative themes in Tagore's works.

Chitrangada (1892) is a Bengali play translated and published as Chitra in English in 1913. Chitra is a one-act play with nine scenes. Chitra is the best among all the plays written by Tagore. Chitra is a lyrical play, and described by critics as flawless and perfect. This lyrical play is based on an episode from the Mahabharata. The theme is one of universal appeal. Tagore ponders on the love between man and woman and its worthiness. It is true that in youth it is related to the body; yet its jurisdiction is not all physical.

## **8.3 THE LEGEND**

The play is based on the story of love between Arjuna, the Pandava Prince and Chitrangada, the Princess of Manipur. Arjuna comes to Manipur during the course of his wanderings to fulfill a vow of penance. He sees Chitra and is attracted by her charming beauty. He then asks the King for the hand of his daughter. The King tells him that one of his ancestors in the kingly line, named Prabhanjana, had long been childless. He performed several penances to obtain an heir. God Shiva was pleased by these austerities and gave him a boon that he and his successors would have one child. The promised child had invariably been a son. Chitravahana, was the first to have a daughter Chitrangada. Therefore, he had brought her up as a son and made her his heir. Chitravahana demands that the son to be born to her should be given to him. On this condition Arjuna takes Chitra as his wife. When a son is born to them, he bids farewell to Chitra and sets out again on his travels.

## **8.4 THEME**

The play is a journey from physical attraction to spiritual love. The main theme is progression from illusion to reality. The fact that physical beauty is temporary is well illustrated in the play. Chitra possess the celestial beauty for a period of one year. When she loses the celestial beauty she appears plain, yet Arjuna accepts Chitra with satisfaction. Though man is attracted to the physical charms he later desires for a higher relationship. Man is not content to have from the female mere company in the physical life, but desires to have

her company in the pursuit of righteousness. Woman too is not content in satisfying man's physical need, she would be his companion in something higher. The state of mind of man and woman is portrayed in the play effectively.

## 8.5 LIST OF CHARACTERS

### Gods Mortals

Madana (God of Love) Chitra, Daughter of a King

Vasanta (God of spring) Arjuna, the Pandava Prince

Villagers

## 8.6 SCENE WISE STUDY

### 8.6.1 SCENE-1

The play begins with Chitra's longing to win Arjuna's love, but as that is not possible due to her manly appearance she prays to Gods to help her.

In the first scene we are introduced to Chitra and Arjuna along with the supernatural characters Madana and Vasanta. In this scene Chitra fails to attract Arjuna. Arjuna too rejects her love saying that he is on a vow of celibacy. She is unhappy because Arjuna had rejected her love. She shares her agony with Madana and Vasanta and seeks their help to win the heart of Arjuna.

Chitra is a strongly built girl without any feminine graces such as beauty, shyness or weakness. Right from her childhood Chitra had developed a fascination for Arjuna, to the extent that she desired to prove her skill against him. One day as she entered a dense forest she found a man lying on a bed of leaves. She pricked him to move but he smiled and left the place without any gesture or talk. Chitra felt feminine by the smile of the man, she says, **"Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me."**

She learns from the man that he is none other than Arjuna, the great Kuru Prince. Chitra had always craved, in her mask as a male, to dare the Pandava warrior to single combat. She realizes that she neither greeted him nor spoke a word. So on the next day, in order to impress Arjuna, she dresses like a beautiful lady by adorning anklets, bracelets, gown of red silk and goes to meet him in the forest temple. Arjuna is not impressed by Chitra's beauty and says, **"I have taken a vow of celibacy. I am not fit to be thy husband!"**

These words disturb Chitra. Had she the time she could win his heart by slow degrees, and not seek help from the Gods. But now that time is short she appeals to the Gods Madana and Vasanta to grant her beauty for a single day. The Gods grant the boon, not for a day but for one year. Vasanta says, **"Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round thy limbs."** Consequently, Chitra gets celestial beauty for one year to fulfill her desire.

### 8.6.2 SCENE II

Arjuna on seeing the newly transformed Chitra falls in love. He becomes curious to know the purpose of such a beautiful lady in the forest for which she says that **"I harbor a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfillment of which I offer daily prayers to Lord**



**Shiva.**”Arjuna’s curiosity grows when he learns that Chitra desires something. During the course of the conversation Chitra reveals that she desires Arjuna. Immediately, Arjuna having forgotten the vow says, **“But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night’s vow of obscurity.”**

Blinded by the false beauty, Arjuna forgets his vow and falls for Chitra. Although Chitra had tried to win the heart of Arjuna on false grounds she could not accept Arjuna falling for the false beauty. She cries **“Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself?”**Arjuna is totally won over by Chitra’s beauty. He says, **“You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman.”**According to Arjuna, Chitra is his world. He had forgotten everything else. Chitra becomes distressed by Arjuna’s response and says that the beauty is false. **“Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go, my hero, go! Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion. Go!”**

Here, let us remember that Arjuna had rejected Chitra in the first scene as she did not appear beautiful. In scene II, Chitra appears in celestial beauty; therefore Arjuna has fallen for a beauty that is not true. On the contrary, the celestial beauty in Chitra does not elate her instead, she feels herself more grieved than before. She realizes how the fame of Arjuna’s heroic manhood is false. She asks Arjuna not to offer his great heart to an illusion.

### 8.6.3 SCENE III

In this scene we learn how Chitra is united with Arjuna. It is understood that Arjuna falls for Chitra and they get married (Gandharva Marriage).Although Chitra had been anxious to attract Arjuna, she feels guilty for the same when Arjuna is attracted by her false beauty.

Chitra shares the anguish with Madana and Vasanta. Chitra says, **This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower; and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will sit weeping day and night.**

Her single night had turned out to be painful. She considers her beautiful appearance as cursed appearance that follows her like a demon. She requests the Gods to take back the boon. Both the Gods console Chitra to overcome the pain and advise her to go back to stay with Arjuna. In the words of Vasanta, **When with the advent of autumn the flowering season is over, then comes the triumph of fruitage. A time will come of itself when the heat-cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee.**

Although Chitra and Arjuna are united, Chitra is seen enveloped in regret and sorrow. She is anguished that her body had become her own rival. The body triumphs, but it is only temporary. Behind this is concealed a cry of agony.

### 8.6.4 SCENE IV

In this scene there is a gradual decline of Arjuna’s ardour as he dreams of home. Initially, Arjuna watches Chitra weaving a garland. Arjuna wonders how Chitra with lightness of touch and sweetness weaves his days of exile into an immortal wreath. He questions if this garland is to crown him when he returns home. Chitra makes it clear that this

love is not for home, she requests him to take home what is abiding and strong. Finally, Arjuna listens to the prayer-bells from the distant village temple. So for the first time he is distracted from Chitra and becomes curious to know about the whereabouts of the bells. Here, we have to understand that Arjuna's mind is hovering around to seek knowledge apart from Chitra.

### 8.6.5 SCENE V

This is the shortest scene in the play. Vasanta cannot keep pace with Madana. Madana is too fast for Vasanta and Vasanta is not able to keep pace with him. He is slowing down.

The bloom of spring begins to fade, though the intensity of love would continue. The dialogue between Vasanta and Madana symbolically represents the inner conflict in Chitra. This scene indicates that Chitra is tired of the false beauty and longs to reveal the truth.

### 8.5.6 SCENE VI

This scene reveals that Arjuna is slowly coming to his original nature. In other words, there is a further decline in Arjuna's infatuation for Chitra. Looking at the downpour of rain his mind becomes busy with thoughts of hunting. He recollects the joys of hunting that he had experienced in the past.

**On such rainy days we five brothers would go to the Chitraka forest to chase wild beasts. Those were glad times. Our heart danced to the drumbeat of rumbling clouds. The woods resounded with the screams of peacocks.....Our sport over, we dared each other to swim across turbulent streams on our way back home. The restless spirit is on me. I long to go hunting.**

Chitra tells Arjuna that **"For me there is no vista beyond "**which means she has neither name nor destination. She says her love is like "dew". Chitra indirectly communicates to Arjuna that her beauty is not true and permanent.

### 8.6.7 SCENE VII

This scene illustrates Chitra's last night with celestial beauty. Madana and Vasanta wish her to enjoy the last moment. Chitra requests the Gods to flash her beauty **"like the final flicker of a dying flame"** and the boon is granted. Vasanta promises to fill her life with a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers. Madana also grants Chitra that her beauty will sparkle brighter than before.

### 8.6.8 SCENE VIII

Arjuna learns from the villagers about Princess Chitra and becomes curious to know about her. He hears many stories of Princess Chitra and imagines what kind of woman she is.

Chitra tells Arjuna that she is neither beautiful, nor had lovely eyes. She is strong and can pierce any target she chose. Arjuna says **"They say that in Valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness"**. Arjuna becomes restless, **"I wonder in fulfillment of what vow she**

**has gone on her pilgrimage”**. Chitra tries to convince Arjuna that she is not beautiful. Her life will never sound sweet to man’s ear. Yet Arjuna imagines Chitra riding on a white horse like a Goddess of Victory. He compares Chitra to a watchful lioness with a fierce love.

As the night falls Chitra tells Arjuna if he would accept the playmate of the night to be the helpmate of the day. Arjuna says **“you appear like a goddess hidden within a golden image. I cannot touch you, I cannot pay you my dues in return for your priceless gifts. Thus my love is incomplete”**. Arjuna curiously waits to know the truth.

### 8.6.9 SCENE IX

This is the last scene of the play and Chitra reveals her true self to Arjuna. Chitra is not the same, now she is the prospective mother of Arjuna’s son.

Chitra is cloaked and appears before Arjuna to explain why she had chosen heavenly flowers to worship him. Now that the flowers are faded (the beauty is gone) she throws them (unveils herself) away. Chitra stands before Arjuna and says

**I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveller in the great world-path, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve flower-beauty, the unsullied loveliness of a moment’s life? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman..... I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference.**

Chitra narrates the purpose of seeking the celestial beauty. Her intention is not to cheat Arjuna, but to win him at any cost. But, due to time constraint she chose the shortest path (deceit) to win the heart of Arjuna. She admits that she is not a perfect beauty. She also admits that she is pregnant with his son. Finally, Chitra says, today I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king. Arjuna is satisfied and accepts the truth. He says, **“Beloved, my life is full”!**

### 8.7 SYMBOLISM IN CHITRA:

As the play progresses Chitra grows from adolescence to maturity. In other words she grows from girlhood to womanhood. Tagore has used symbols to represent the growth in Chitra. Symbolism plays an important role in the play, Chitra.

Madana and Vasanta help Chitra to possess celestial beauty. **Madana-** is a symbol of Love. Madana kindles love in Chitra. **Vasanta-** is a symbol of spring and eternal youth.

Vasantha’s boon makes Chitra feel like a beautiful flower of spring season. **Watchful lioness-** Chitra is compared to a watchful lioness. Like a lioness Chitra protects her villagers with her fierce love. **Dew drop on kinsuka petal-** Chitra compares her life to a dew drop on a flower. The beauty of a dew drop is temporary, so is the life of attractive Chitra whose celestial beauty will disappear shortly. **Flower-** is a major symbol used in the play. Flowers are beautiful and used to worship God. Chitra has chosen celestial beauty (flower) to worship

Arjuna. Therefore, she seeks boons from the Gods for celestial beauty. However, she is aware that the beauty of the flower is short and that it has neither past nor future.

This play significantly represents the transformation of Chitra from girlhood to womanhood. The image of the flower represents girlhood and its progression to fruit symbolizes womanhood. Towards the end, Chitra reaches a stage of fulfillment similar to the stage of fruition in a flower. The symbolic meaning is related to the essential duality of love: Arjuna's boredom and his longing for the other, real Chitra, and Arjuna's acceptance of real Chitra towards the end and the final spiritual fulfillment. The transformation takes place because of time, which plays a crucial part in the play.

## 8.8 SUPER NATURAL DEVICE

The two Gods Madana (god of Love) and Vasanta (the god of Spring) are the supernatural devices introduced in the play. Madana and Vasanta constitute a significant part in the play. They grant Chitra a boon of beauty for the span of a year with the help of which she captures Arjuna. Similarly, on the last night Chitra prays to Madana to grant her beauty that should burn at its brightest. Madana says, **Thou shalt have thy wish.** As a result the gods have helped Chitra and Arjuna to understand the physical love. At the end, Chitra offers her heart at the feet of Arjuna. Arjuna is charmed by the purity, tenderness, dedication and beauty of her soul. It is only because of the gods that Chitra is able to experience the meaning of real love.

## 8.9 CHARACTER OF CHITRA

The character of Chitra is crucial in the play. Tagore portrays Chitra as true Chitra and false Chitra. **True Chitra** is a great warrior. She is bold, courageous, daring, and determined and moreover she is full of the feeling of dedication and devotion towards her duties. She does not have physical charm. She has a tender heart with strong body. **False Chitra** obtains boon from the Gods. She is beautiful and attractive. Chitra is fully conscious that her procured beauty would shortly vanish, as the petals fall from an overblown flower. It is impossible for her to keep up the disguise.

The play depicts that there is an evolution in the character of Chitra. She grows from innocent girlhood to the mellowness of motherhood. Similarly, we can observe the transition from the fire of flowery spring to the mellow fruitfulness of Autumn. Chitra is brought up as a boy, because King Chitravahana had no sons. She is a great warrior, she never had the chance to truly live as a woman or learn how to use feminine wiles. When she sees Arjuna the man of her choice; the woman in her springs up. On her first glance at Arjuna, the feminine qualities are awakened and she spontaneously falls in love with him.

In the beginning, Arjuna refuses the love of Chitra as she was plain-looking. But Chitra is firm to win Arjuna's love even on false pretences. In fact she had a dream from childhood to compete with Arjuna. She feels a vacuum within and craves for physical beauty to capture his heart and discards all her male attire. She resolves to win Arjuna's love by false means. She pleads with the Gods, God of Love (Madana) and God of Spring (vasanta), to grant her divine beauty for one day. But the Gods grant her the boon for one year. On seeing the celestial beauty of Chitra, Arjuna forgets his vows and surrenders to her. He accepts her love and marries her. Chitra thus wins the love of Arjuna.

On the one hand, Chitra is a very promising princess and bears all the responsibilities towards her kingdom; on the other hand she is a devoted beloved of Arjuna and becomes the victim of love and emotions. However she is unhappy over deceiving Arjuna. Neither of them is happy. Chitra is unhappy because he doesn't really love her, and he is unhappy because he senses that there is something wrong. Chitra tells Arjuna that their love is not for home.

**Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten.**

She is impatient to reveal her true self to Arjuna, and is prepared to bear her fate in silence. The true character of Chitra is revealed in the following lines: **I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he reject it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence.**

Although Chitra is unhappy with the borrowed beauty the Gods convince her to be happy and that at the year's end Arjuna will be able to embrace the true Chitra once the spell of beauty is gone. Finally, Chitra presents her true self to Arjuna:

**I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveller in the great world-path, my garments are dirty, and feet are bleeding with thorns, where should I achieve flower-beauty the unsullied loveliness of a moment's life? The gift that I proudly bring you are the heart of a woman.**

This truth brings joy, pleasure and perfection to both Arjuna and Chitra. The personality of true Chitra is unfeminine because she is brought up as a boy. She has even forgotten that she is a woman. She is plain and unattractive, loves to hunt and protect the villagers from the wild beasts. She is a terror of evil doers and is like father and mother to her people. She is a man in valor, but woman in tenderness.

When Arjuna refuses Chitra she is not the kind of woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile. Tagore has pointed that the flower of her desire refuses to droop before it has ripened into a fruit. It takes one's life time to know the true self; hence she chooses the easy path of illusion. Chitra through experience makes an effort to obtain self-knowledge. With the progress of time Chitra's practical experiences instruct her into self-knowledge.

She is conscious that her borrowed beauty would shortly vanish, as the petals fall from an overblown flower, the only moment of her sweet union would slip from her, leaving her ashamed of her exposed poverty, which she would spend weeping day and night. It is impossible for her to keep her disguise and she prefers to accept the hard truth sooner than the false happiness. Chitra proves that a woman is not merely a passive flower of her husband.

**If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe whom I am nourishing in my womb, be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me.**

Chitra clarifies that woman is a helpmate of man and is not merely his partner. Towards the end, Arjuna accepts her. When Arjuna learns the truth, real love flares up. He says, **Beloved, my life is full!** As a result true love is born of deep understanding, agonies experienced and shared. She becomes all the more beautiful because she has known love, and because she is now a prospective mother.

### **8.10 CHARACTER OF ARJUNA**

Arjuna, the great warrior, forgets his vow of celibacy on seeing the celestial beauty of Chitra and falls in love. He treats Chitra as an object of pleasure and nothing more. He falls a victim of perfect beauty namely Chitra who enjoys the bliss of loveliness endowed by the Gods.

In the first scene Arjuna does not find anything interesting in Chitra. Arjuna handsome, tall and masculine, turns away from her. He had taken a vow of celibacy which he could not violate. But when he meets Chitra endowed with beauty by the Gods he accepts her. The victory of the body over the soul is revealed here. Arjuna falls a prey to the physical beauty. He says, **But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity.**

After much time, Arjuna begins to grow restless. He also longs to go back and resume his royal duties. **My Kshatriya's right arm, idly occupied in holding it, forgets its duties.** He also begins to ask Chitra questions about her past, wondering if she had anyone at home that is missing her. Chitra remarks that she had no past and that she's as transient as a drop of dew, which upsets Arjuna. Arjuna hears tales of the warrior Princess Chitra. He declines to sleep with Chitra, saying that some villagers have informed him that Manipur is under attack. Chitra assures him that the city is well protected, but to no avail. Arjuna's mind is occupied with thoughts of the Princess Chitra.

The decline of Arjuna's infatuation is presented in gradual stages. From the world of shadows and dreams gradually Arjuna awakens into his real self. This is so because dreams cannot enwrap a man forever they are bound to vanish. The development of Arjuna's character is seen when his thoughts are full of hunting and recollecting past memories. His heart is dissatisfied and he expresses the need to hold on to something permanent. The year is not yet over but Arjuna is tired. **My heart is unsatisfied, my mind knows no peace.** This shows that the indulgence in physical pleasures leave a man dissatisfied.

Towards the end, on learning the truth Arjuna is satisfied and fulfilled. Arjuna is not unhappy on knowing the truth, but feels a sense of contentment. The last dialogue in the play is uttered by Arjuna, **Beloved, my life is full.** Chitra and Arjuna realize that mere beauty cannot be the value of life.

### 8.11 POINTS TO REMEMBER

- There is an evolution in the character of Chitra from illusion to truth.
- **True Chitra** is brought up as a boy. She has even forgotten that she is a woman. She is plain and unattractive, loves to hunt and protect the villagers from the wild beasts.
- **False Chitra** is attractive because she has received celestial beauty from the Gods as a boon. However, she is unhappy to deceive Arjuna in the disguise.
- While False Chitra is illusionary and temporary, true Chitra is real.
- Love and beauty are feelings belonging to the soul; that is why Arjuna is content towards the end when he learns the truth.

### 8.12 CONCLUSION

The play concludes on the note that nothing is permanent, youth and beauty are transient, and death is inevitable. The union between man and woman is the marriage of true minds, a spectrum ranging from the sensual to the spiritual. The main point that is communicated in the play is that love is worthwhile not for the joys of the body but for something greater and beyond. Spiritual love evolves from the physical love. The love of the spirit is higher. The essence of real love is on the spiritual plane and not on the physical plane.

To sum up, as beauty and truth are transient; wisdom lies in neither looking upon the body nor placing emphasis on the physical. From this play we learn that marriage is a spiritual relationship which fulfills man's being in all its aspects and not merely the physical.

### 8.13 COMPREHENSIVE CHECK QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the symbolism in Tagore's Chitra.
2. Write a note on the character of Chitra.
3. Do you agree with the statement Chitra is the best play written by Tagore. If so why? Justify your answer with suitable reasons.
4. Highlight the theme of Chitra? Also comment on the use of supernatural devices.

### 8.14 REFERENCES

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## LESSON 9

# HAYAVADANA

### OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this lesson is to understand

- the theme of the play,
- study the significance of the title,
- and appreciate Modern Indian Drama

### STRUCTURE

- 9.1 Introduction to Indian English Drama
- 9.2 Girish Karnad
- 9.3 Use of Myth
- 9.4 Plot
- 9.5 Theme
- 9.6 List of Characters
- 9.7 Hayavadana
- 9.8 The play in brief
- 9.9 Character of Padmini
- 9.10 Character of Devadatta
- 9.11 Character of Kapila
- 9.12 Dramatic Techniques
- 9.13 Conclusion
- 9.14 Comprehension Check Question
- 9.15 References

### 9.1 INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

In the introduction let us study in brief on the **history of Indian English Drama** and its development in post modern era. India has rich heritage of Drama from the ancient times. Drama in India begins its journey with the Sanskrit plays. The theory of Drama is preserved in “**Natyasastra**” the oldest texts.

Drama in Sanskrit literature is covered under the broad umbrella of ‘**rupaka**’ which means depiction of life in various aspects represented in form by actors who assume various roles. The Sanskrit drama grows around three primary constituents namely plot (vastu), Neta (hero) and Rasa (Sentiment). Bharata ascribed a divine origin to drama and considered it as the fifth veda. Its origin seems to be from religious dancing. Only drama (natya) produces flavor (rasa). The drama uses the eight basic emotions of love, joy, humor, anger, sadness, pride, fear



and wonder. The supreme achievement of Indian Drama undoubtedly lies in Kalidasa who is called the Shakespeare of India. The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the twelfth century in India when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. But till the fifteenth century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage. Later, due to foreign invasions on India the dramatic activity ceased.

### **Modern Drama:**

The rise of the modern drama dates back to the eighteenth century when the British empire strengthened its power in India. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays mainly Shakespeare's in cities like Bombay and Madras. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two great sage poets of India, are the first Indian dramatists in English. Secular playwriting in Bengali and Marathi began after the setting up of universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in the mid 1850's.

The English drama of the two decades after Independence produced very little work. Most playwrights wrote one or at most two plays and used the dramatic form more to tell a story through dialogue than to offer a theatrical experience. They wrote on mythical or religious themes. Further the development of theatre declined due to the lack of performance opportunities which deprived the playwrights to learn the art. Until 1968, Theatre Group had staged only European and American plays. Towards the end of the 1960s, however, a strong back to the village movement had started amongst the urban elite, affecting social and cultural attitudes in important ways.

### **Post Modern Drama:**

The dramatist in the post modern era have enriched the tradition by giving new dimensions and introducing new ideas, social criticism and new experiments in theatrical performances. India has produced number of playwrights but some have only remained names in the history, a few were heard and read, but drama as a genre never got its share of limelight like novel and poetry. Contemporary Indian drama deviated from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. A cumulative theatrical tradition evolved by Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad prepared the background of Indian English theatre.

## **9.2 GIRISH KARNAD**

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, near Mumbai, on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1938. He hails from a Konkani family of Mangalore. He completed his graduation from Karnataka University, Dharwad, in 1958 and lived in Mumbai for further studies. He received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and went to England. He was at Oxford from 1960 to 1963; he joined Oxford University Press, Chennai which gave him an opportunity to get exposed to various kinds of writing. He was awarded Doctor of Letters by Karnataka University, Dharwad, in 1994, for his contribution to art, culture and literature. He is a recipient of Padmashri in 1974 and Padmabhushan in 1992. He won the prestigious Gnanpith award in 1999.

Girish Karnad has substantially contributed to enrich the tradition of Indian English theatre in the capacity of writer, director and actor. Karnad had watched stage performances in England, the enactment of the plays of several world known dramatists like Shakespeare. He introduced new themes and became famous in India and around the world. He is a versatile dramatist who has introduced new techniques and thematic variations unparalleled in the history of the theatrical activities in India. The most important feature of his plays, viewed from several perspectives, is the creation of female protagonists in radical manners. He traces ancient Indian culture, myths, mythologies and folklores, studies the portrayal of women in puranas and combines them with contemporary world where women are struggling to establish their identity and space of honor.

Karnad's woman is contemporary, 'new' woman in search of identity in the society which secures freedom to female sex on par with male counterpart. His woman is the products of the post modern world who desire to achieve what they lack, revolt against the patriarchy and male dominance, demolish culture and tradition anticipating society.

His well known plays are *Yayati* (1972), *Tughlaq* (1962), *Hayavadana* (1970), *Nagamandala* (1972). He borrowed his plots from history, mythology and old legends but with intricate symbolism, he tried to establish their relevance in Contemporary socio-political conditions. The history of Indian social and cultural ethos is required to be known for proper understanding of Karnad's plays and their contents on various planes and his female characters in particular.

Women's position in Indian society, from the ancient times to the present, has undergone different values and respect. Karnad has taken up the Hindu marriage system for critical examination in his plays. The Hindu marriage system demands a commitment from a woman after marriage to her husband, family, society and culture. Her extramarital relationship is condemned and she is excommunicated. Karnad strikes upon these traditional bondages to free woman from the authority of society. Karnad links the plays with mythical, folkloristic presentation and establishes continuity. He discusses women's sexuality and adultery with such honesty, treating them as 'normal' human response and not as something 'sinful'. Karnad has a refined idea of sexuality. He has supported extra-marital relationship even if it is for the sensual fulfillment and this concept is reasonable supported by his conscience and social thoughts.

### **9.3 USE OF MYTH**

Indian myths have always been the source of inspiration for many Indian dramatists like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo. Karnad has used myths, mythologies, legends and folktales and taken plots from these sources and invested with the contemporary events and problems in the modern Indian drama in English. Karnad does not take myths in their entirety. He takes them only in parts that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination.

The story in the main plot of *Hayavadana* is based on a myth taken from Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara* and Thomas Mann's version of the same story of 'Transposed Heads'.

Thomas Mann ridicules the mechanical conception that holds the head superior to the body. Karnad in his 'Hayavadana' used the same myths to project the theme of fundamental ambiguity of human life. He makes the play an interesting study of man's quest for a complete and wholesome experience of life. He combines the transposed heads plot of Mann with Hayavadana story which is entirely Karnad's own invention. This is how Karnad makes use of a myth.

#### **9.4 PLOT**

Karnad represents main plot and sub plot in the play. The main plot, the story of a love triangle between Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, is drawn from the Kathasaritsagara, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. The sub-plot of 'Hayavadana' is further development of his story based on Thomas Mann's text, 'The Transposed Heads'. The sub-plot represents the problem of Hayavadana's desire for completeness. There is deep identity crisis. Hayavadana wants to regain his identity. Hayavadana is the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. Hayavadana was born a horse-headed man. In order to get rid of the horse-head and become a complete man, he visits many holy places, tries magic and mantras and gets blessings of holy men, gods and goddesses but finally becomes a complete horse. Hayavadana represents the aspirations of human beings for the unattainable.

Girish Karnad represents the superiority of head not only in the main plot but also in sub plot. The play depicts the realm of incomplete individuals, speaking gods, speaking dolls, and mute child.

#### **9.5 THEME**

The theme of the play 'Hayavadana' focuses on

- incompleteness and search for identity
- the division between body and mind
- superiority of mind on body.

#### **9.6 LIST OF CHARACTERS**

Bhagavata  
Actor I  
Hayavadana  
Devadatta  
Kapila  
Padmini  
Doll I  
Doll II  
Kali  
Child  
Actor II

## 9.7 HAYAVADANA

Hayavadana is a man with the head of horse. “Haya” means horse and “vadana” means face. Hayavadana’s mother is a beautiful princess of Karnataka. Her father invited Princes from the world and encouraged his daughter to choose her husband. She did not like any but the last one is the prince of Araby who is sitting on his white stallion. She liked the horse and marries the stallion and lives with him for fifteen years. One morning the stallion is transformed into a gandharva. This being had been cursed by God Kuvera and was born as a horse. After fifteen years of human love he came to his original self. Gandharva becomes happy and invites his wife to the Heavenly Abode. She refuses to go, so he curses her to become a horse herself. Hayavadana’s mother becomes a horse and runs happily. Gandharva goes to the heavenly abode and Hayavadana the child of their marriage is left behind.

Hayavadana desired to become a complete man but at last he became a complete animal. In the beginning of the play Hayavadana had a horse head but a man’s voice and body. In contrast to his desire he changes as a horse like his mother. Hayavadana achieves completeness, when he becomes a complete horse and loses the human voice through singing the Indian national anthem.

Hayavadana reappears in the end of the play. He tells Bhagavata how he went to the goddess to become a complete man. He requested the Gods to make him complete even before he could say “make me a complete man” he became a complete horse. The result is he has become a complete being. Now the human voice is the only obstacle. He sings patriotic songs to get rid of the human voice. His liberation is complete only when the five year old son of Padmini asks him to laugh and the laughter soon turns into a proper neigh. He neighs with joy. Padmini’s son returns home in triumph. He becomes a normal child. This change of Hayavadana becoming a complete horse affirms the supremacy of head over body.

## 9.8 THE PLAY IN BRIEF

The main plot of the play begins with Kapila, who finds his best friend Devadatta dreaming about Padmini. Kapila goes to Padmini’s house to arrange Devadatta’s marriage and realizes that Padmini is as clever as she is beautiful. Although Kapila is attracted to her, he nonetheless finalizes the match, and Devadatta and Padmini are married. A few months after the marriage, the three travel to Ujjain to a fair. On the way, they rest between two temples, one devoted to Rudra and the other to Kali. Devadatta and Kapila go to Kali temple one after the other and chop off their heads. Later, Padmini too moves into the Kali temple to find the two friends in the pool of blood. She was afraid that she might be blamed for their deaths and decides to kill herself. But Goddess Kali stops her and offers to bring the men back to life. Padmini rearranges the heads so that Devadatta’s head is on Kapila’s body and Kapila’s head is on Devadatta’s body. Goddess Kali brings the two men back to life.

Thus the play has a new problem that has to be resolved. Padmini claims Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body to be her husband. They visited great rishi to solve the problem who said head is superior to the body therefore; the man with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body will be Padmini’s husband. Thus with the new body of Devadatta, Padmini and Devadatta return to the

city and lead a blissful marital life. Karnad introduces two dolls that Devadatta presents to Padmini as gifts to the expected child. Through the dolls the writer describes the changes that occur in the body of Devadatta. They demonstrate the change of Devadatta's body from its rough muscular Kapila-nature to a soft, pot-bellied Brahmin body. They reveal that Padmini is dreaming about Kapila. Padmini sends Devadatta to Ujjain fair to get new dolls, meanwhile she goes to the forest in search of Kapila.

Although the pathway is tedious in the forest Padmini manages to find the rough and muscular Kapila. Kapila is surprised to see Padmini. She reveals her desire. Devadatta too arrives with a sword and two new dolls, finds the lovers, and the two men decide to kill each other since their love for Padmini cannot be reconciled. Padmini entrusts the boy to Bhagavata and leaves instructions to him to be raised both as Kapila's son and as Devadatta's son.

Hayavadana's story begins again in the end. An actor is afraid of listening to the song of National Anthem sung by a horse. Meanwhile another actor brings Padmini's son to the stage. The boy is silent but serious clutching two dirty dolls. Goddess Kali has answered all his prayers so Hayavadana has returned with his head and body of a horse. He still has a human voice and sings patriotic songs. Hayavadana begins laughing when he sees actor and Bhagavata, his laughter infect the mute child with laughter, and the child begins to speak and laugh normally.

The child's laughter causes Hayavadana to lose his last shreds of his human nature and he begins to neigh like a horse. The child is complete now so as Hayavadana now a complete animal.

## 9.9 CHARACTER OF PADMINI

Padmini is the central character of the play. The incompleteness of human desire is symbolized by Padmini. She is a beautiful female character in the play. She is innocent, clever, energetic and cruel. Through the female character Karnad presents the image of modern woman who is caught between two ideas, one is her quest for completeness and other is her search for individual rights in male-dominated society. Padmini is the sixteenth woman who has come in Devadatta's life. She is the daughter of the leading merchant in Dharmapura, a wealthy and prosperous person. In her house **the very floor is swept by the Goddess of wealth. In Devadatta's house, they've the goddess of learning for a maid.**

### Marriage:

The married life between Devadatta and Padmini does not seem to be full of contentment and pleasure though she has conceived from him. Kapila continues to visit Devadatta as usual.

She develops a secret desire for Kapila. However, she convinces Devadatta by saying, **You got annoyed about Kapila. But why? You are my saffron, my marriage-thread, my deity. Why should you feel upset? I like making fun of Kapila-he is such an innocent. Looks a proper devil, but the way he blushes and giggles and turns red, he might have been a bride.**

The first meeting between Padmini and Kapila in Padmini's house reveal their attraction to one another which later turns to love. Their desire to see each other and spend time together is observed in the play. Devadatta spends much of his time in reading poetry or plays or writing, paying less attention to his wife and her sensual desire. Padmini needs a man who can fulfill her desire with his strong body. She insists for a trip to Ujjain so that she can spend much time with Kapila. Padmini's infatuation with Kapila annoys Devadatta. He realizes that Padmini is in love with Kapila when he observes her, her interest in Kapila's body and her secret obsession to possess him.

### **A Visit to the Temple:**

All the three go on a trip to Ujjain. Padmini enjoys the trip to Ujjain. **What a terrible road. Nothing but stones and rocks-but one didn't feel a thing in the cart! You drove it so gently-almost made it float.** They halt in the midst of the forest. Padmini sees a glorious tree and demands flowers from the tree. Kapila responds immediately, he climbs the tree for the fortunate lady's flower. Padmini admires Kapila climbing the tree effortlessly. Devadatta notices Padmini's longing for Kapila and says, **No woman could resist him-and what does it matter that she's married? What a fool I've been. All these days I only saw that pleading in his eyes stretching out its arms, begging for a favour..... And when I did-took the whites of her eyes for their real depth. Only now-I see the depths-now I see these flames leaping up from those depths.**

Padmini, probably finds a source of sensual satisfaction in Kapila. She is impressed in Kapila's body and is interested in him. But is conscious that Devadatta would notice her, **How long can one go on like this? How long? How long? If Devadatta notices....** Though she wanted one flower Kapila brings her a load of flowers. Though pregnant she has forgotten the physical discomfort, in the joy of Kapila's company. She takes care to make Kapila comfortable.

In the forest, while Padmini supports Kapila's preference to see temple of Rudra, Devadatta is humiliated and this drives him into a psychic indisposition.

### **Temple of Goddess Kali:**

Devadatta remembers his promises and visits the temple to sacrifice his head. Kapila in search of Devadatta visits the temple and is shocked to see Devadatta dead. Kapila being a close friend of Devadatta follows him in chopping the head. Padmini who has been waiting for them in the forest proceeds to the temple and is surprised to see both in a pool of blood. **Oh God! What's this? Both! Both gone! And didn't even think of me before they went? What shall I do?** Padmini decides to offer herself to the Goddess at that juncture a voice is heard to drop the sword. Thus she is saved from hacking off the head. She pleads the Goddess to give them life, so does the Goddess, but Padmini by mistake has misplaced the heads. So when they come back to life Devadatta has got Kapila's body and Kapila has got Devadatta's body. However, she seemed to be the happiest creature with a perfect man. Padmini who developed longing for Kapila, now goes with Devadatta in a victorious manner. Her adventure brings the two friends turn enemies.

**The change:**

Padmini is excited by possessing a complete man with profound intellect and strong body. She is content and satisfied. Devadatta appears new to her **What a wide chest. What other canopy do I need? My Devadatta come like a bridegroom with the ornament of a new body...** She is unhappy to see Devadatta applying sandal oil on his body, because that would sweep away the muscular body of Kapila which she cherishes. Devadatta exhibits manly strength and Padmini is satisfied. **Fabulous body-fabulous brain-fabulous Devadatta.**

The body slowly loses its strength and listens to the head. He returns to the studies reading and writing. His strength started to deteriorate. Devadatta's changed body to the original self becomes a cause of worry for Padmini. She loses the joy she has gathered. Her desire to see Kapila increases and she sends Devadatta to Ujjain to buy dolls. In his absence she goes in search of Kapila.

**In the Forest:**

Padmini does not desire to live with her husband when she leaves the home with her son in search of Kapila by sending Devadatta to Ujjain. She locates Kapila in the forest and finds consolation in being near him and she even rests her head on his chest. She expresses her love for Kapila as **My Kapila! My poor, poor Kapila! How needlessly you've tortured yourself.**

Padmini shows Kapila that the child has the same mole as on his shoulder thus exhibiting her love for him. She tells Kapila that **My son had never laughed with the river or shivered in the wind or felt the thorn cut his feet. So I brought him out. I lost my way in the woods.** But Kapila insists Padmini to go back to Devadatta. However, she stays there saying, **My son's tired. He's asleep. He has been in my arms for several days now. Let him rest a while. As soon as he gets up I'll go.**

Devadatta too comes to the forest in search of Kapila. He is surprised to hear that Padmini also has been there for about five days, with a child in her arms. Kapila notices Devadatta and says that he has been waiting for him since the previous day. When Kapila proposes to Devadatta to live together like Pandavas and Draupati, Padmini does not comment on the proposal but stays standstill looking at them. Devadatta and Kapila fight for Padmini and die.

**Death:**

Padmini wonders that the people in the city of Dharmapura would say that she had extramarital relationship with Kapila and in their fight to take possession of her body both have killed each other. Therefore, she decides to offer her life as a sacrifice. She has no choice but to commit "sati".

She gives the child to the hunters who live in this forest saying that the child is Kapila's son. She bestows double parentage to her son by wishing him to be brought up by the hunters until age five and then by Brahmin Vidyasagar. Unlike an archetypal Indian woman, she does not suppress

her desire for Kapila and wants both of them alive. Her idea of liberty in sex and physical orientation remains unachieved. Padmini is a modern woman and not a traditional one. Her quest for completeness and perfection brings downfall in her personal life. She tries to revolt against socio-cultural forces but finally dies.

### 9.10 CHARACTER OF DEVADATTA

Devadatta is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagar. He is fair in complexion, unrivalled in intelligence. He is interested in poetry and literature. He has written excellent poetry and achieved name and fame for his poetry. He defeats several scholars in debates on poetry. He is the apple of every eye in Dharmapura. Devadatta is the mind and Kapila the body.

They are two great friends in the city of Dharmapura. He develops his mind and ignores the body.

Devadatta falls in love for the sixteenth time and this time it is Padmini who has caught his attention. Devadatta perceives his feelings but lacks initiative. He prays to God that **if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra.** Kapila perceives the situation and talks to Padmini and arranges for the wedding of Devadatta and Padmini.

Devadatta forgets his vows to the Gods and leads a happy married life. During their trip to Ujjain they halt near the banks of the river Bhargavi, which is close to the temple of Rudra. At this juncture Devadatta recollects the oath he had taken. Padmini and Kapila go to Rudra temple.

Devadatta is annoyed, **Good-bye, Kapila. Good-bye, Padmini. May Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart-live happily together. I shall find happiness in that. Give me strength, Lord Rudra. My father, give me courage. I'm already trembling, I'D never thought I would be so afraid. Give me courage, Father, strengthen me.** Thus Devadatta goes to Kali temple and cuts off his head and dies. He pleaded the Goddess to forgive him as he had forgotten the promise.

Kapila, who comes in search of Devadatta to the temple, follows him in chopping the head. When Padmini too gets ready to hack she is stopped by the Goddess and saves all the three.

Devadatta and Kapila get new life in the temple with inter changed heads. Now the question arises who is Padmini's husband. Devadatta says **According to the Shastras, the head is the sign of a man.....** Thus Devadatta with Kapila's body goes with Padmini.

The new body of Devadatta would not resist jumping into a wrestling pit or doing gymnasium without a single thought. Gradually, in a period of six months the body obeys the head. The body of Devadatta has regained its fair, delicate original state. This transformation of the body is depicted through the dialogues uttered by the dolls.

When Devadatta goes to the forest in search of Padmini he finds Kapila and questions if he likes Padmini. Kapila says **yes,**



**Kapila: Devadatta, couldn't we all three live together-like the Pandavas and Draupadi?**

**Devadatta: What do you think?**

**(Silence. Padmini looks at them but doesn't say anything.)**

**Kapila: (Laughs.) No, it can't be done.**

**Devadatta: That's why I brought this. (Shows the sword.) What won't end has to be cut.**

**Kapila: I got your body-but not your wisdom.**

**Devadatta: Where's your sword then?**

Thus Devadatta and Kapila fight with their swords killing each other leaving Padmini alone baffled at the situation.

## 9.11 CHARACTER OF KAPILA

Kapila is the only son of an ironsmith Lohita. He is dark and plain to look at. In physical strength he has no equal. He plays games and participates in sports. He defeats many wrestlers in competitions. kapila is a close friend of Devadatta. He will be ready to do anything for Devadatta. In his words, **Don't you know I would do anything for you? Jump into a well-or walk into fire? Even my parents aren't as close to me as you are. I would leave them this minute if you asked me to.** Before padmini enters the life of Devadatta and Kapila they were friends of 'one mind, one heart'.

Kapila takes the pain to go to Pavana Veethi in search of Padmini. The first time when Kapila sees Padmini and talks to her over Devadatta's proposal he senses that she is not the right person for her.

**Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. You can't bear a bitter word or an evil thought. But this one is fast as lightning-and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel. But what can one do? You'll never listen to me. And I can't withdraw now. I'll have to talk to her family...**

When the three plan to Ujjain trip, Devadatta cancels the trip out of concern towards Padmini's health. But Kapila becomes upset, **What am I to do for the rest of the day? What am I to do for the rest of the week? Why should it feel as though the whole world has been wiped out for a whole week? Why this emptiness...Kapila...You are slipping, boy, control yourself. Don't lose that hold.**

In the temple of Goddess Kali, Kapila is annoyed to find Devadatta dead.

**You've cut off your head! You've cut off your head! Oh my dear friend, my brother, what have you done? Where you so angry with me? Did you feel such contempt for me-such abhorrence? And in your anger you forgot that I was ready to die for you? If you had asked me to jump into fire, I would have done it. If you had asked me to leave the country, I would have done it. If you had asked me to go and drown in a river, I would have accepted. Did you despise me so much that you couldn't even ask me that?**

Kapila, a good friend of Devadatta could not see Devadatta in a pool of blood so he too cuts his head and joins Devadatta in the death leaving Padmini alone. Later, Padmini approaches the temple and with the help of the Goddess Kali Devadatta and Kapila come back to life, but with transposed heads. Initially all the three are happy and they sing together

**What a good mix!  
No more tricks!  
Is this one that  
Or that one this?  
Ho! Ho!**

In a short time their joy ceases as Kapila questions **Whose wife is she?** They quarrel over the claim of Padmini. Finally, they listen to a rishi who says head is superior to the body, therefore, the head of Devadatta with the body of Kapila will be Padmini's husband. Kapila being upset goes to the forest and never returns to the city of Dharmapura.

At last when Padmini goes in search of Kapila to the forest she finds Kapila transformed thoroughly. In the words of Kapila,

**When this body came to me, it was like a corpse hanging by my head. It was a Brahmin's body after all-not made for the woods. I couldn't lift an axe without my elbows moaning. Couldn't run a length without my knees howling.....a war started between us.**

In a period of six months Kapila has regained his original body. Now looking at Padmini he says, **I had buried all those faceless memories in my skin. Now you've dug them up with your claws.** He desires to stay with Padmini, but as that is not possible Devadatta and Kapila fight and kill each other.

## 9.12 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

### 9.12.1 The Female Chorus:

The central theme of the play is expressed by the female chorus as

**Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many-petalled, many-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?.....A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and a song branches out in the sky.**

The chorus represents Padmini's unconventional attitude to have relationship with two men. The two men were best friends before Padmini came into their life. The chorus hints at Padmini's intention to obtain a complete man at the stake of having a relationship with two men instead of one. The two men that appear in Padmini's life are Devadatta and Kapila. Caste

divides both of them. Devadatta is a Brahmin and Kapila is the son of an ironsmith and thus belongs to a low caste. Their interests are also different. Devadatta is absorbed in his books and Kapila in his wrestling matches.

When Padmini goes to see Kapila in the forest, she is united with Kapila which is represented by the chorus as

**The river only feels the  
Pull of the waterfall.  
She giggles, and tickles the rushes  
On the banks, then turns  
A top of dry leaves  
In the navel of the whirlpool, weaves  
A water-snake in the net of silver strands  
In the green depths, frightens the frog  
On the rug of moss, sticks and bamboo leaves,  
Sings, tosses, leaps and  
Sweeps on in a rush-**

The female chorus support Padmini's decision to go for a composite form. The chorus is modern and sympathetic in their perception.

### **9.12.2 The Dolls:**

The dolls express the feeling in the unconscious level of human psyche in Hayavadana. The dolls watch the action between Devadatta and Padmini. The dolls observe Padmini's quest for Kapila. The dolls narrate Padmini's dream about Kapila and reveal the illicit desire she feels but as a married woman she cannot articulate it. Thus the presence of dolls becomes functional in order to show the unuttered thought of Padmini.

**Doll I: Behind her eyelids. She is dreaming.**

**Doll II: I don't see anything.**

**Doll I: It's still hazy-hasn't started yet....Do you see it now?**

**Doll II: (Eagerly) Yes, yes.**

**(They stare at her.)**

**Doll I: A man...**

**Doll II: But not her husband.**

**Doll I: No, someone else.**

**Doll II: Is this the one who came last night?**

Padmini tries to bring the best of mind and body in a person and that is the result of a disaster. The dolls voice out the character of Padmini. The dolls disseminate Padmini's world. With their traditional view which upholds fidelity and integrity with husband.

The transformation of Devadatta's body is represented through the dolls.

**Doll I: His palms! They were so rough, when he first brought us here. Like a labourer's. But now they are soft-sickly soft- like a young girl's.**

**Doll II: I know. I've noticed something too.**

**Doll I: What?**

**Doll II: His stomach. It was so tight and muscular. Now....**

**Doll I: I know. It's loose....**

Thus Karnad shows that the head is superior to the body. In a period of six months the body regains the original form.

### **9.12.3 Goddess Kali:**

Goddess Kali plays an important role in the play. Karnad reveals the religious sentiments prevalent in our society by showing the presence of Goddess. Devadatta offers himself to Goddess Kali. He is followed by Kapila. When Padmini too is about to sacrifice herself she hears the voice of the Goddess.

**Yes, it's me. There was a time-many many years ago-when at this hour they would have the mangalarati. The devotees used to make a deafening racket with drums and conch-shells and cymbals. So I used to be wide awake around now. I've lost the habit. (Yawns). Right. What do you want? Tell me. I'm pleased with you.**

The Goddess was sleepy and did not protect Devadatta and Kapila. In fact, the Goddess expresses anger towards them as:

**The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devadatta-he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it-head to him and arms to me! .....Then this Kapila, died right in front of me-but 'for his friend'. Mind you! Didn't even have the courtesy to refer to me. And what lies! Says he is dying for friendship.**

Finally, on Padmini's request the Goddess Kali brings back Devadatta and Kapila to life. The Goddess plays a role of faith and belief in people.

## **9.13 CONCLUSION**

To conclude, the play is a blend of issues such as love, identity and sexuality with folk culture. Karnad has projected moral and philosophical aspect in the main and the sub-plot of Hayavadana raising issues relating to the human existence. All the three characters in the main plot love one another and are victims of this complexity and duality in life. Of the three, Padmini is the worst sufferer. In the search of completeness all the characters meet their death. Karnad has conveyed through his character a transparent sensibility-aspiring for the incarnation of perfection-a picture of ever thirsting modern woman. He deals female character in a different manner. Padmini is not a traditional woman, she represents a modern woman who wants

completeness and perfection. She wants a complete man with the strong body of Kapila and head full of intellect like Devadatta. The story of the sub-plot, Hayavadana's search for complete being merges with the main plot. Since the head is superior Hayavadana becomes a horse. Karnad conveys that the world is of incomplete individuals and that the human's desire for completeness cannot be fulfilled.

### 9.14 COMPREHENSIVE CHECK QUESTIONS

1. Write a brief note on the theme of incompleteness in Hayavadana.
2. Discuss the character of Padmini in Hayavadana.
3. Write an essay on the dramatic technique employed by Girish Karnad in Hayavadana.
4. Explain the main plot in Hayavadana.
5. Elaborate on the significance of the title Hayavadana.

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**Dr. G. Srilatha**

## LESSON 10

# COOLIE: A NOVEL BY MULK RAJ ANAND

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this lesson are

- To render readable material for a thorough understanding of a creative work
- Taking the reader through the facts of the Novel.
- To help anyone to see and enjoy the various nuances employed by the artist.
- To establish a rapport between the material presented and a discriminatory reader of literature.
- To provide necessary inputs like chapter summaries, character sketches, plot summaries and topical essays.
- To suggest that these are not all exhaustive but that one should dive deep into the primary source i.e. the novel.

The students are advised to go through the textual summary from chapter one to chapter five. A knowledge of the creative material is more important than a reading of the novel - for a deeper understanding of any literary work than any critical observation.

### STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 A brief summary of the novel 'Coolie'
- 10.3 Thematic Structure and Techniques in the novel Coolie
- 10.4 Technical Terms
- 10.5 Topics for discussion
- 10.6 Self- Assessment Questions
- 10.7 References

#### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand one of the most highly regarded Indian novelists writing in English. He was born in Peshawar in 1905. He was educated at the Universities of Lahore, London and Cambridge and lived in England for many years, finally settling in a village in western India after the war. His main concern has always been for the creatures in the lower depths of Indian Society who once were men and women: the rejected, who had no way to articulate their anguish against the oppressors. His novels of humanism have been translated into several world languages.

Anand has written several novels and short stories. He wrote his first novel when he was at the age of twenty seven. His favourite topics are hunger, poverty and social injustice. In this respect he was influenced by the teaching of Gandhiji and Karl Marks. He expresses his social concern in his writings. Hence, he is called a committed writer.

'untouchable' is Anand's first novel written in 1935. His other important works are

Coolie (1936), Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), The Village (1939). Across the Black Waters (1940), The Sword and the Sickle (1942) and the much acclaimed Private life of an Indian Prince (1953). His autobiographical novels, Seven Summers (1950). Morning Face (1968), which won the National Academy Award, Confession of a Lover (1972) and the Bubble (1988) reveal the story of his experiments with truth and the struggle of his various egos to attain a possible higher self.

## 10.2 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL 'COOLIE'

Mulk Raj Anand's second novel *Coolie* is written within three months and got it published without much difficulty in 1936. The novel has been translated into more than thirty eight languages. Some call it an 'epic of misery', others call it an 'odyssey' of a coolie. Anand himself calls it a Whitman poem 'Passage to India' V.S.Pritchett praises it as a political novel of high order.

Munoo, an orphan; naïve hill boy of hardly fourteen is compelled to move from place to place against his will in order to earn his living. His father dies of the feudal exploitation and mother of poverty and hunger. An orphan faces domestic exploitation at the hands of his uncle and aunt. They find their nephew, fourteen year old boy, old enough not only to earn his own living but also to support his uncle who works as a 'chaparasi' in one of the banks in the town. They send him to work as a servant in a middle class family in a small town. Here he is exploited by the wife of his master. She treats him like an animal and other members of family treat him like a monkey; an instrument of amusement. In one of such entertaining act in the role of a monkey he bites the daughter of his master.

Nathoo Ram, the master considers it as a sexual assault on his daughter and beats him mercilessly. Munoo can no longer bear the cruelty and slips out of the house. Prabha Dayal, an owner of the pickle factory in a neighbouring town feels a strange affinity for this orphan boy and takes him home as an errand boy. Fortunately, the kind hearted wife of Prabha gives him love of his mother. But Ganpat, the partner of his master treats all the workers mercilessly.

Ganpat betrays his partner by spending the clients' money extravagantly on drinking and whoring. Prabha gets ruined. The partner's treachery not only ruins him but also breaks him completely. He sells out his factory and repays the loan. Munoo works as a coolie not only to earn his living but also to help his master. But Prabha returns to his native place leaving Munoo alone. While wandering to get a job, Munoo meets an elephant driver who takes him to Bombay. Here with the help of Hari, a mill worker, he gets a job and shelter. A child of fourteen is compelled to work for eleven hours a day on meager wages. Here the head foreman, Jimmie Thomas whom labourers call Chimta Sahib makes his life miserable. He treats the factory workers as animals.

Ratan, a co-worker protects Munoo from his exploitation but pays the penalty by losing his job. The workers go on strike to protest. But instead of reinstalling Ratan, the management gives them a notice of reducing their working hours. To divert the attention of the agitators they spread the rumour that the Hindu child has been kidnapped by a Muslim. The workers enraged with the communal frenzy, spread riot all over the city. Munoo gets hurt in it and cannot return home. In the morning he meets with an accident. A car knocks him down. The owner of the car, Mrs. Mainwaring takes him to Simla. Munoo recovers soon and starts working as a domestic servant and a Riksha-puller for Mr. Mainwaring. The strenuous work deteriorates his health. The disease turns out to be tuberculosis, Despite all the possible

treatments, one day, he dies on the lap of his friend. As the central theme of the novel is exploitation, Anand portrays two classes of characters: the exploiter and the exploited. Munoo is the only major character and a number of minor characters are placed around him in every phase of his life.

Anand's *Coolie* says the novel seems to be Anand's perspective on the question of social justice in the Indian context as verified in the life and lot of a poor hill boy. Munoo is a microcosmic reality reflecting and signifying the larger reality of the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots' and the mechanisms that operate in our society in favour of the rich and powerful and positively hostile to the marginalized and the poor. Poverty is thus the root cause of all the evils in the life of the protagonist. Poverty makes his father lose his land and makes his mother unable to bring up her son. Both of them die, leaving their child, an orphan. Thus the root cause of the feudal exploitation is poverty. Even Daya Ram, Munoo's uncle, tries to get rid of his nephew due to poverty. Munoo desperately fights for his survival in every phase of his life. The constant fear of poverty and hunger makes him accept various occupations at various places. He continues his weakening struggle for existence with the dreams of bright future. But he always remains abject and drab.

A.S. Desan, in his essay, "Anand's Art of Fiction: A Journey into existential Humanism" analyses the cause of Munoo's exploitation. He says, Munoo's plight in *Coolie* is a symbol of societal negation of life, love and natural affection. Death versus life is the predominant emotion of the artist in the novel.

### 10.3 THEMATIC STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUES IN THE NOVEL COOLIE

In the present study, an attempt has been made to analyse and interpret the thematic patterns and techniques of Mulk Raj Anand's novels. The greatness of his fictional art lies in his ability to translate human misery and predicament into a live and pulsating reality. As an extremely sensitive and aware person, Mulk Raj Anand felt acutely the wide gulf between the haves and the have-nots'. The sheer insensitivity of the mighty and powerful ones of society towards the unfortunate poor baffled him. Even as a child he resented the orthodox restrictions leveled against the outcasts and low caste people. As he matured his emotional apprehension of reality shaped his intellectual response as well. Thus making his presentation not just emotional but also rational. His novels, therefore, embody the entire world of man and society. They depict the subtle aspects of human relationships which generate actions and reactions.

The novels of Mulk Raj Anand within their complex of thematic structure and techniques invite immense possibilities of explorations and insights. Apart from the countless number of studies undertaken on Mulk Raj Anand, the thematic aspects of his novels, even in their traditional classification offer multiple interpretations and insights. Man and society form a variegated fabric of life. Within the complicated structure of society lie the joys and sorrows of man. Mulk Raj Anand with his exposure to various social theories and philosophies has incessantly attempted to present a just and righteous vision of life. His novels deal with socio-economic aspects of life. As a progressive writer sympathising with the Sarva hara (the deprived class of society), Mulk Raj Anand envisions a world of love and human concern.

Ever since human settlements came into existence, the issue of equal distribution of various resources among human beings has caused grave concern. The relationship between master and servant, husband and wife, parents and children, have assumed several shades.



The strong exercise their power over the weak in terms of money and social status. In a country like India where the caste system is still very strong, the issues of untouchability, child labour, exploitation of factory and tea-garden workers form a very prominent thematic pattern in Mulk Raj Anand's novels.

The greatest contribution of Mulk Raj Anand to Indian English fiction is his vast coverage of various themes and their explication in an innovative and imaginative manner.

The pre-independence period was marked by several events. The entire country was passing through a period of multifarious changes at every level of society. Struggle for freedom was the governing event but it engendered in people a determination to seek social justice in every sphere of life. Mulk Raj Anand's novels reflect the fast changing social climate of India.

The thematic design of a novel depends largely on the author's concerns of life. The human concerns which engaged Mulk Raj Anand intensely were deeply related to discrimination, orthodoxy, social disparity, untouchability and the highhandedness of the powerful and the rich. The themes of his novels depict these concerns in an intensely artistic and realistic manner. Mulk Raj Anand weaves the plots of his novels to reveal the stark reality of life and also generates a positive view point. To Mulk Raj Anand, the world in general and India in particular, was fraught with social injustice. He focused acutely on the wide and deep divide between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. His themes dwell upon the subtle aspects of discriminations which underline his strong preference for humanism. It is this enlargement of feelings, heart and mind which govern his thematic pattern.

Mulk Raj Anand is, no doubt the pioneer in this field and has dealt with themes of poverty, hunger and suffering of Indian masses in a number of his novels and short stories. The themes of his major novels are untouchability, hunger, poverty and suffering of Indian masses.

Mulk Raj Anand emerges as the champion of the underdogs and a crusader against social distinctions and man-made barriers which divide humanity. He vehemently condemns the insensibility, self-centredness and lack of human sympathy and understanding in the upper strata of society for the poor and the exploited. He is both a realist and humanist whose fundamental aim is to establish the fundamental oneness of mankind.

Mulk Raj Anand's love for novelty and originality enables him to carry the tradition of Tagore and Premchand Bankim and Sarat Chandra to new heights. Mulk Raj Anand, has definitely modernized the Indian novel giving it a new shape. Mulk Raj Anand, made a departure from the tradition of Indian fiction. He succeeded in interpreting The Soul of India to the west in the form they could easily understand and appreciate his interpretation of India is based on realism as his protagonists are based on the real characters with whom he freely mixed for play and friendship, paying no attention to their caste, class or creed. As Mulk Raj Anand himself acknowledges in the 'Preface':

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude owed them for much of the

inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret.... They were flesh of my flesh and blood of blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of his life.”

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel *Untouchable* deals with the problem of casteism in general and untouchability in particular, in vivid artistic terms and its artistic power is evident in every page of the novel. *Untouchable*, lays bare the humiliating experience of Bakha who challenges the Brahminical attitudes of high caste people. His biting satire against the high caste and the rich exposes their double standards. Sohini is otherwise an untouchable, yet the high priest of society do not hesitate to desire sexual pleasure from her body. In his novel he attacks casteism. He says casteism is a crime against humanity and everyone who believes in human dignity should actively try to eliminate it.

One of the social concerns that recurs frequently in his novels is the inequality between the wealthy and the poor. He expresses his deep sorrow and sympathy for the unfortunate poor and their inability to cope with circumstances. He poses these problems of social inequity at large and also attempts to seek resolutions to the social conflicts. His novels also aim at wiping away social barriers and orthodoxy, casteism and communalism. His themes depict the complex social structure of society which is devoid of humanism.

Mulk Raj Anand's second and third novels *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, are directed mainly towards the evils of class system. These novels show that class is a greater evil than caste system. The tragedy of Munoo in *Coolie* and exploitation of Gangu and the ill-treatment of his beautiful daughter, Leila in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, present this truth.

*Coolie*, is a heartrending saga of human suffering. Munoo's travails and tribulations are sharp pointers to man's sadistic pleasure in torturing child domestics. Munoo represents those memberless children whose childhood is lost in endless physical labour. Love, care and fun are strange words for them. Mulk Raj Anand takes up the theme of human suffering again and again.

In conclusion it can be said that Mulk Raj Anand has used his imagination and creative skill to transform facts into fictions to present a realistic vision of life. He has organized his material with great care and skill. His novels definitely evince a thematic unity.

Mulk Raj Anand's literary contributions map the pre-independence and modern India. His novels universalize issues which concern every man and every country. He produces a tragic vision of life but also finds resolutions to the problems it presents. In his novels he envisions a world permeated with love and good will.

#### 10.4 TECHNICAL TERMS

**Indo-Anglian:** (1) Denoting India (place name of Indian)

(2) Languages denoting India/Indian.

**Naive :** (of a person / action) showing a lack of experience, wisdom or judgement

**Exploitation:** The action/fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work or the action of making use of and benefit

**Protagonist:** The leading character hero/heroine or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel etc. (or) An advocate or champion of a particular cause or idea

### 10.5 TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Discuss the significance of place and time in this novel.
- Discuss the novel has social ambivalence or historical ambivalence
- What is the theme of the novel Coolie by Mulkraj Anand.
- Caste and class conflict in Mulkraj Anand's Coolie.
- Discuss Social pretesting Coolie.

### 10.6 SELF- ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the themes of Mulkraj Anand's Coolie in English Literature.
2. Explain the Social realism in the novel Coolie.
3. Write the Character of Munoo in the novel Coolie.

### 10.7 REFERENCES

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# **LESSON 11**

## **THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI : A NOVEL BY R.K. NARAYAN**

### **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this lesson are

- To render readable material for a thorough understanding of a creative work
- To take the reader through the facts of the Novel.
- To help anyone to see and enjoy the various nuances employed by the artist.
- To establish a rapport between the material presented and a discriminatory reader of literature.
- To provide necessary inputs like chapter summaries, character sketches, plot summaries and topical essays.
- To suggest that these are not all exhaustive but that one should dive deep into the primary sources of the material.

The students are advised to go through the textual summary from chapter one to chapter twelve. A knowledge of the creative material is more important than a reading of the text of the novel- for a deeper understanding of any literary work than any critical observation.

### **STRUCTURE**

- 11.1 Biographical Introduction / About the Author
- 11.2 About the Novel “The Man-Eater of Malgudi”
- 11.3 Plot summary
- 11.4 Characters in the novel
- 11.5 Social Concerns/Themes
- 11.6 Techniques
- 11.7 Themes
- 11.8 Style Point of View
- 11.9 Summary
- 11.10 Criticism
- 11.11 Technical Terms/Quotes
- 11.12 Objects/Places
- 11.13 Self Assessment Questions
- 11.14 Reference Books

### **11.1 BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION / ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

R.K. Narayan is one of the renowned Indo-Anglian novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born on 10th of October, 1906. His father, Krishna swami Iyer was a School Master in

Mysore. He was graduated from Maharaja's College, Mysore at the age of 24 with several failures in the examinations.

After his graduation, he worked for a while in the Mysore Secretariat and later for 4 to 5 days as a teacher in a village school. He left the job of teacher and started writing short stories to the daily news paper 'The Hindu'. But he couldn't be a sub-editor because he did not know short-hand. In the circumstances, he resolved simply to write novels.

He married Rajam in 1935. She could not read English but that did not prevent her from taking the keenest interest in her husband's work. But in 1939, she died due to typhoid. Rajam's death was for Narayan both a shattering and a rewarding experience. R.K. Narayan is one of the outstanding Indian writers in English. His style of writing is always simple and straight-forward. He uses the language of the common man but packs it with the most suitable words to bring alive the particular situations.

R.K. Narayan was born in Madras and educated in Mysore. He was a Journalist before he became a novelist. His famous novels are: Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, The Dark Room, The English Teacher, Mr. Sampath – The Printer of Malgudi, The Financial Expert, Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide, The Vendor of Sweets, The Painter of Signs, A Tiger for Malgudi, Talkative Man, The World of Nagaraj, Grand Mother's Tale. (10 Novels and 6 collections of Short Stories on travelogue and a retelling of legends).

R.K. Narayan's important short stories are: A Horse and Two Goats, An Astrologer's Day and other Stories, Lawley Road, Malgudidays, under the Banyan Tree and other Stories, Memoirs, My Days, Travel, My Dateless Diary, The Emerald Route.

His Essays are: Next Sunday, Reluctant Guru, A Writer's Nightmare, The World of the Story-Teller. His retold legends are: Gods, Demons and others, The Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

## 11.2 ABOUT THE NOVEL "THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI"

This is the story of Nataraj who earns his living as a printer in the enchanted world of Malgudi, that slumbering southern Indian village whose peace has been so often amusingly and outrageously disturbed by Narayan.

Nataraj and his close friends, a poet and a Journalist, find their congenial days disturbed when Vasu, a powerful taxidermist; moves in with his stuffed hyenas and pythons and brings his dancing women up to the printer's private stairs when Vasu, in search of a larger game, threatens the life of a temple elephant that Nataraj has befriended, complications ensue that are both comic and calamitous.

A note unwelcome death occurs; murder is suspected and Nataraj and his friends point guilty fingers at each other and those around them. The suspense never slackens in this bizarre, yet moving tale.

Prof. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar says Malgudi is otherwise known as it is R.K. Narayan's Casterbridge. That means Casterbridge is the favourite town of Thomas Hardy, an English novelist, like that Malgudi is the favourite village/town of R.K. Narayan. Malgudi is the

model of Indian village. The people of malgudi are very generous and humane. Some people say it may be coimbathore. It represents the village weather, middle class families, and other scenarios etc.

There are two clubs in Malgudi town one is an English club and the other is an Indian club. Dr. Paul and Mr. Bal are used to visit the club everyday. It is a developing town. The town is connected with the Memphills through buses and taxis.

The structure of the novel is tight and the plot is full of layers of suspense. It is full of humorous situations. The irony is at its best displayed in the novel. It begins with the beginning of the story that tells of the breaking of traditional joint households due to the petty quarrels and women's jealousies. Vasu plants himself in Nataraj's attic; never bothers to say a word about payments, Snatches the green folder containing the list of big donors, files a complaint of harassment of his tenants against Nataraj without ever being his tenant or paying him a paisa for rent. These situations are truly ironical. All this is possible because he is always alert and assertive. The police inspector finds himself nonplussed when asked if he had a warrant to enter his premises. The inspector collapses at one stroke of Vasu.

### 11.3 PLOT SUMMARY

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is an Indian novel, written in English by R.K. Narayan. It revolves around the life of a printer named Nataraj, who lives in a huge ancestral house. He leads a contented lifestyle, with his own circle of friends, such as a poet, Sen, the politician and Sastri, his assistant whom Nataraj respects very much. One day, a taxidermist named Vasu arrives at the office of Nataraj and demands the printing of 100 visiting cards. Although Nataraj does this, Vasu seems to have no intention of paying him.

Vasu is a type of a bully, and is often compared to a Rakshasa (a Demon) by Nataraj and Sastri. Vasu takes up residence in the attic of Nataraj's house, and does not pay him any money or sign any contract based on the rent. Vasu is a muscleman, proud of his strength. As the story continues, Vasu encroaches on Nataraj's life, and scares away his friends, his customers and soon.

One day, Nataraj decides to hold a function to commemorate the release of a book of poetry by the poet friend of his. Later, he learns that Vasu plans to shoot an elephant for his

collection in the procession of Nataraj's friend. The protagonist frantically try to stop him, but in vain. As Nataraj decides to talk to Vasu for once and for all, he finds Vasu sleeping, but the next morning he discovers that Vasu is dead.

The autopsy takes place, with the verdict being that he was not poisoned and that there are no signs of physical injury. The case is declared closed, but the reputation of Nataraj's press is ruined and his friends and other people start avoiding him. Later, Nataraj learns from Rangi, a woman who was familiar with Vasu, that Vasu was not murdered, but died in the attempt to smash a fly sitting on his temple. He had damaged one of his nerves with his powerful hands and died instantly.

Now Nataraj is rid of Vasu, and the story ends on the note that all demons, rakshasas and monsters are the downfall of themselves.

Nataraj is the owner of a small press in Malgudi. He leads a normal life until a bull-headed taxidermist named Vasu enters his shop. Vasu is at first a normal customer. He employs Nataraj to print some business cards. However, as the weeks pass, Vasu becomes more and more familiar with Nataraj's press, and those who frequent the press, a poet and a journalist, learn to avoid the bullying taxidermist.

Vasu talks Nataraj into lending him the apartment above the press, which Vasu immediately turns into a taxidermy operation, complete with dead animals, skins and solvents. The taxidermist goes on a hunting spree, poaching animals in the forests of Mempi, a village outside of ....

Nataraj, the owner of a small printing press, spends his days conversing with the individuals who lounge in the front room of his store, a poet and Sen, a journalist. The poet is translating Krishna's life into monosyllabic verse. Sen talks incessantly about the mistakes of the president, Nehru. Nataraj's only employee is an old and loyal typesetter named Sastri. One morning, like all mornings, Nataraj bathes and washes his clothes in the river. On his return trip from the river, Nataraj encounters several individuals with whom he is acquainted, including a cousin, who dislikes him, and a septuagenarian.

Nataraj is disliked by his extended family because of an incident that occurred after the passing of his grandmother. His extended family which amounts to fifteen people, had at one time lived under the same.....

## 11.4 CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

### 1. Nataraj:

The owner of a small printing press that is located in Malgudi, Nataraj is a father and a husband who is very much concerned with family affairs. At the start of the novel, Nataraj is a man obsessed with power. He enjoys his position as boss, so much so that he separates his press with a blue curtain, assuring that his customers will not see him lowered to a handyman position beneath Sastri. The blue curtain maintains his ego. Nataraj's blue curtain, as well as his ego, is slowly cast aside, and by the end of the book, Nataraj has lost the curtain and his ego. It is this change in character that qualifies the press owner as the only round character in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

### 2. Vasu:

Vasu a taxidermist, villain of the novel.

### 3. Sen:

Sen a poet and journalist, friend of Nataraj.

### 4. Sastri :

Employee and friend of Nataraj

### 5. Muthu :

A tea shop Owner.

### 6. Kumar :

An elephant which was brought from Memphi hills by Natraj for medical treatment.

### **7. Rangi :**

A temple dancer and a prostitute.

### **8. Joshi:**

Doctor who treats Kumar (The elephant)

## **11.5 SOCIAL CONCERNS/THEMES**

The Man-Eater of Malgudi has been interpreted in two different ways: as an allegory of good and evil, and as a study in identification and displacement. Readings of the work as an allegory focus on the relationship between the narrator Nataraj, the passive and well-meaning printer of the town of Malgudi, and Vasu, the eccentric taxidermist and out of townner who forces his way into Nataraj's attic and uses it to house himself and practice his seemingly grisly profession. In the allegorical view, Narayan represents Indian passivity while Vasu embodies the aggressive forces of modernism poised to threaten and destabilize Indian society. Certainly, Vasu unsettles the whole community and seems to overwhelm everyone with his brusque personality and antisocial tendencies. This version of the plot of The Man-Eater of Malgudi derives credibility from the mythological underpinnings of.

## **11.6 TECHNIQUES**

Like most of Narayan's novels, The Man-Eater of Malgudi is written in clear, straightforward prose. Narayan's dominant tone is of gentle irony; Narayan seems to be incapable of heavy-handed satire or cynicism. He shows a marked ability to control the narrative pace, shifting adroitly from the slow-moving opening scenes to the fast-paced end where Nataraj and the townspeople maneuver to thwart Vasu. Since The Man-Eater of

## **11.7 THEMES**

### **Ego/Pride**

The theme of ego and pride relates to the moral of The Man-eater of Malgudi, which is that those who are prideful will eventually bring about their own destruction. Vasu is incredibly egotistical, caring only for himself and ignoring the needs of others. He also believes that he can do whatever he wants. Stories and quotes referring to this theme appear throughout this book. Foreshadowing Vasu's downfall, Sastri states that "he shows all the definition of a rakshasa. Every rakshasa gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something will destroy him." Also, the story of Bhasmasura, the demon is a clear foreshadowing of Vasu's demise. The demon, much like Vasu, destroys himself.

Although not readily apparent, Nataraj also suffers from an inflated ego. At the beginning of

## **11.8 STYLE POINT OF VIEW**

The Story is told from the first person point of view of Nataraj, the press owner. This viewpoint is consistent throughout the story, with the exception of chapter ten, when a group of individuals, excluding Nataraj, visits Vasu. This part of the story is Nataraj's retelling of Sen's story. At this point, the story switches briefly to the third person point of view.



The Man-eater of Malgudi is Nataraj's retelling of events that occur in and around Malgudi. As both narrator and participant, Nataraj has the ability to influence the reader's point of view, and the reader must keep in mind that Nataraj is not an objective observer. He views things as a pacifistic, family-oriented, business-minded press operator would complete with stereotypes and opinions. However, Nataraj is a fair minded individual who is not prone.

## 11.9 SUMMARY

The novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* was first published in USA by the Viking Press in 1961, in U.K. in 1962, and in India in 1968.

Nataraj, the main character in the novel, has a printing press on Market Road, "with a view of the fountain". He is the narrator of the novel through whose eyes we see the various events in Malgudi. His son, little Babu, studies in Albert Mission School. Nataraj is such a good man that 'anyone who found his feet aching as he passed down Market Road was welcome to rest in his parlour on any seat that happened to be vacant'. He is incapable of being hostile to anybody.

"I could never be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enmity worried me day and night. As a school boy I persistently shadowed round the one person with whom I was supposed to be on terms of hate and hostility. I felt acutely uneasy as long as an enmity lasted....It bothered me like a tooth ache".

Among his constant companions are a poet who is writing the life of God Krishna in monosyllabic verse, and Sen, the journalist who is always blaming Nehru for everything that goes wrong. His neighbor, the Star Press has all the staff one could dream of and an 'Original Heidelberg' machine. But Nataraj is assisted by Sastri, an old man, who is a foreman, compositor, office boy, binder, accountant—all rolled into one. Nataraj lives in Kabir Street, which ran behind Market Road. His day starts before four in the morning when he sets out to the river for his ablutions.

Into this calm and quiet world of Malgudi comes Vasu, the power hungry taxidermist, upsetting everything. He sets up residence in the little room on top of the press and causes endless trouble to poor Nataraj. He cares no more for human beings than wind or fire to the thunderstorm. He is the man-eater of Malgudi, who rushes round madly in his jeep, scattering poor law-abiding citizens right and left. He is six-feet tall in a country where the average human height is considerably less. He has trained himself to demolish a three-inch thick teakwood door with a blow of his fist. His completely amoral nature is revealed right at the beginning when he tells Nataraj what happened to the 'Phaelwan' who tried to push Vasu out.

"I knew his weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chopping movement...and he fell down and squirmed on the floor. I knew he could perform no more. I left him there and walked out".

"You didn't stop to help him" I asked.

"I helped him by leaving him there, instead of holding him upside down and rattling the teeth out of his head".

"Oh No", I cried horrified.

“Why not, I was a different man now, not the boy who went to him for charity. I was stronger than he”

When Nataraj reminds him that after all the phaelwan was his ‘guru’ and gave him twelveeggs a day, not to mention the hundred almonds and half a seer of milk daily,

He threw up his arms in vexation. ‘Oh, you will never understand these things, Nataraj. You know nothing. You have not seen the world. You know only what happens in this miserable little place.’”

The name ‘Vasu’ is significant. It could be an abbreviation of Vasudeva, one of the names of Krishna. If it is ‘Vasu’ with a short ‘a’; it signifies one of the eight forces of nature attending upon India, the god of Thunder. A little later, Vasu carries Nataraj away by force in a jeep, not caring for what happens to the ‘adjournment lawyer’ waiting anxiously for the printing of the invitation cards for his daughter’s wedding. He is taken to the Mempo hills and is able to get back to Malgudi only with great difficulty with the help of Muthu and the conductor of a bus, who instructs the passengers every now and then as though he was a headmaster dealing with school children:

“I am not stopping for more than five minutes; if any one is left behind, that’s all. I warn you all, don’t blame me later.”

The seat of honour has to be reserved for the ‘Circle’ (the Police Inspector), who will not pay for his seat and if the seat of honour is not immediately vacated when he approaches, the Circle will impound the entire bus with all its passengers at the next stop for overcrowding.

With the ‘Circle’ inside, the bus will crawl at 20 miles an hour; and the driver will have to apply the brake even when he finds a piece of paper drifting across. Once the Circle, disembarked, the bus will tear down the obscure lanes and unsuspected nooks to pick up passengers whose fares will not go into the regular accounts but into the pockets of the driver and the conductor.

“That was how a three hour jeep ride in the morning was stretched out to eight on the return journey.”

Vasu carries on a trade in stuffed animals. No creature is safe when he sets his eyes on it. As for the sanctity of life, he has no compunction whatever at shooting a cat. Or the children’s dog, to study their anatomy, and recommends that everyone should have in his puja room a stuffed ‘garuda’, the sacred bird. For him a stuffed animal is much better than a natural one. Vasu scorns with indignation the notion of being a zoo-keeper. He is a taxidermist, one who improves on nature with the help of science. Nataraj’s mind seeths with ideas to throw out this destroyer.

Vasu, the demon in human form is in complete contrast to the simple and shy Nataraj who likes to keep himself uninvolved. But he is just incapable of saying ‘no’ to anyone and thus gets into endless complication: Vasu the taxidermist, now involves him in a litigation of ‘trying to evict a tenant by unlawful means. Nataraj has to seek the help of the ‘adjournment lawyer to take care of the court proceedings’. The sanitary Inspector receives complaints from Nataraj’s neighbours regarding the dead animals on his terrace. All he does is to send a printed form to say that the matter is receiving attention. Sastri is against all sorts of low

class women wandering around the press. But Vasu makes no bones about taking a different women upstairs each night. Nataraj in his innocence “had had no notion that our town, possessed such a varied supply of women.” Rangi, a notorious character of the town, living in the shadows of Abu Lane, the daughter Padma, an old temple dancer, now pays regular visits to Vasu and becomes his constant companion.

The climax of the story is the celebration arranged in the town in honour of the poet who completes the portion of the poem where Krishna meets his future wife Radha, and their marriage is to be celebrated. Donations are collected. An elaborate ritual is planned including a procession and feast for a thousand. Appeals for donation are scattered far and wide and this draws Vasu into their fold again. When Nataraj asks for a donation of a hundred rupees, Vasu only walks away with the green folder containing the festival subscription list and has not the slightest intention of being answerable to any one for the monies collected in his self-appointed capacity of treasurer of the festival accounts.

A new complication arises when Rangi informs Nataraj that Vasu is planning to shoot Kumar, the temple elephant during the festival procession. Nataraj had taken great pains to get Kumar, the temple elephant cured of its illness. The next day the whole town was agog with the celebration. The chairman of the Municipal Council had agreed to preside over the function. Now Nataraj was completely preoccupied with the thought of saving Kumar. His direct appeals to Vasu are of an avail.

When Vasu is bearded in his den by a Police inspector and other men and interrogated regarding his gun licence, he is incensed and, just to show the power of his fist brings his palm flat down on the iron frame of the cot and cracks it. In the midst of the celebration, Nataraj unknowingly lets out a terrific cry to save the elephant. He is obsessed with the idea of saving the elephant at any cost. When the procession reaches his place late in the night, Nataraj creeps into Vasu’s room, finds him asleep on a long easy chair by the window, with a pillow under his head. He crawls towards the gun, seizes it and aims it at Vasu while the procession passes below the window. Just at this moment Nataraj was startled by the alarm bell of the clock. The gun drops from his hand and he makes a dash for the landing out of Vasu’s reach.

The next morning Vasu is found dead in the easy chair. Vasu’s mysterious death brings a number of people under suspicion most of all Rangi and Nataraj himself. There is a general rumour and Nataraj had tackled the Rakshasa single-handed and Babu his son is innocently spreading the story that would bring the noose round his father’s neck. But we know that neither Nataraj nor Rangi, anyone else of the Malgudi characters will commit murder even in a ‘just’ cause.

The report of the pathologist reads:

“Mr. Vasu of Junagath died of a concussion received on the right temple on the frontal bone delivered by a blunt instrument,” Nataraj had clung to the idea that Rangi had poisoned Vasu and then smashed his head. But chemical examiner at Madras reported.

“No trace of poisoning.”

Truth is at last revealed by Sastri. Rangi remains with him when he died. Rangi keeps away the mosquitoes which he hated, with a fan. He dozes off. After a little while she dozes off too, having had a fatiguing day and the fanning stops. Rangi is awakened by the man yelling:

“Damn the mosquitoes.” “She saw him flourish his arms like a madman, fighting them off as they buzzed about his ears to suck his blood. Next minute she heard a sharp noise like a thunder-clap. The man had evidently trapped a couple of mosquitoes which had settled on his forehead by bringing the flat of his palm with all his might on top of them. The woman switched on the light and saw two mosquitoes on his brow. It was also the end of Vasu.”

### 11.10 CRITICISM

The *Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a great fable or allegory of the modern age. Vasu shows off his great strength and in the processings his own grave, because the cot is broken, and he has to stretch himself on an easy chair on the fateful night. He is bothered by the mosquito bite which he hates and could not stand and so he hits and in the process kills himself.

An adaptation of a puranic story, the novel is archetypal, emerging from the collective unconscious of universal humanity. It is the story of Jack the Giant Killer and David and Goliath, all over again. Only Narayan has profited by what scientists like Haldane could see and have set down that when one has to deal with a creature sixty feet tall, one hasn't to do anything at all—the creature will collapse under its own weight when, it moves a step. It is not necessary even to sling a pebble. A mosquito will do.

Every Rakshasa contains within himself the seeds of his destruction. This was the case with Ravana, Mahishasura and Bhadmasura. In the novel, Sastri waxes eloquent with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Puranas:

“There was ‘Ravana’, the antagonist in *The ‘Ramayana’* who had ten heads and twenty arms, and enormous yogic and physical powers and a boon from the gods that he could never be vanquished. The earth shook under his tyranny. Still he came to a said end. Or take Mahisha, the asura who meditated and acquired a boon of immortality and invincibility, and who had secured an especial favour that every drop of blood shed from his body should give rise to another demon in his own image and strength and who nevertheless was destroyed. The Goddess with six arms, each bearing a different weapon, came riding for the fight on a lion which sucked every drop of blood drawn from the demon. Then there was Bhadmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing could ever destroy him. He made humanity suffer. God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of great beauty, named Mohini, with whom the asura became infatuated. She promised to yield to him only if he imitated all the gestures and movements of his own dancing.

At one point in the dance, Mohini placed her palms on her head, and the demon followed this gesture in complete forgetfulness and was reduced to ashes that very second, the blighting touch becoming active on his own head. Every man can think that he is great and can live for ever but no one can guess from which quarter his doom will come.”

The Modern Rakshasa does not have to be ten headed and armed with twenty hands. Science and technology makes him more powerful than Ravana or Mahishasura. He too, like the old Rakshasas glories in his strength, recognizes no one, and nothing as superior to himself, is scornful of the weak and rides rough shod on them. He has no use for either God or man.

The sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita describes the two orders of beings in this world—the godly and the devilish. The devilish, the asuras, are those who say that the universe is without truth or a moral basis, without God.

“He was an enemy of mine. I killed him and many others too I’ll kill. I’m master (here) I take my pleasure (as it will): I’m strong and happy and successful.”

So speak fools deluded in their ignorance, according to Lord Krishna.

Narayan does not ignore the presence of Evil in this world. How is one to deal with it? By fighting? Violence begets violence. Even an angry word, an authoritarian manner, leads to counter-attack and conflict.

“Aggressive words only generate more aggressive words. Mahatma Gandhi had enjoined on us absolute non-violence in thought and speech, if for no better reason than to short circuit violent speech and prevent it from propagating itself.”

The eruption into the little world of Malgudi of a non-moral creature like Vasu, bestriding it like a Colossus, causes panic. There seems to be a huge eclipse. But it is a temporary phenomenon; what is unnatural carries within itself its destruction. The darkness lifts and the sun shines again.

### 11.11 TECHNICAL TERMS/QUOTES

“I have made a habit of collecting Golden Thoughts, and I have arranged them alphabetically. I wish to bring them out in book form and distribute them to school children, free of cost. That is how I want to serve our country.” Chapter 3, p.28.

“There was a prowler last night, so they say. We saw pug-marks on the sand and sheep were bleating as if they had gone mad.” Chapter 4, p.33.

“What about the permit. You didn’t have one?” Chapter 4, p.47.

“After all it was who agreed to take the man in. You have only yourself to blame.” Chapter 5, p.57.

“I swear that I gave him the attic for free, absolutely free, because he asked for it.” Chapter 5, p.62.

“Nataraj, you know my grandson had a pet- a dog that.....”

### 11.12 OBJECTS / PLACES

#### **Malgudi**

Malgudi is a small, imaginary town most likely located in southern India. This is the setting for most of the story.

#### **Kabir Street**

Kabir Street is the location of Nataraj’s house.

### **Queen Anne Chair**

A luxurious Queen Anne chair sits in the foyer of Nataraj's press. Vasu insists on sitting in this chair.

### **Nehru**

Nehru is Prime Minister of India during the mid-twentieth century.

### **Heidelberg**

The Heidelberg printing process is owned by Nataraj's neighbor, the star press.

### **The Blue Curtain**

The blue curtain divides the press's inner workings from the eyes of outsiders. The division caused by this curtain will slowly diminish, fading completely by the end of the book. The curtain can be viewed on several levels, as *The Man-eater of Malgudi* can be viewed on several levels. First, the curtain can represent Nataraj's ego. The curtain protects his.

### **Topics for Discussion**

1. Discuss the significance of place and time in this book.
2. Is Vasu a rakshasa? If so, what would be his story? Include weaknesses and strengths.
3. Discuss the significance of the blue curtain.

### **11.13 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the novel as an allegorical representation of the problem of evil.
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Vasu and Nataraj.
3. Narayan's comic vision and art as revealed in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi'
4. How far is Malgudi a realistic representation of India and Indian life?
5. The novel is an archetypal portrayal of the struggle between good and evil. Discuss.

### **11.14 REFERENCE BOOKS**

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## LESSON 11

# FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN- I – ANITA DESAI

### OBJECTIVES

- To enable the students acquire an understanding of Anita Desai's novels; wherein she endeavours to discover facts of life; draw one's attention to it; and finally reveal the essence and relevance of things
- To facilitate the students appreciate and comprehend her approach to life and its diverse predicaments; the manner in which she projects the human relationships and the complexities prevailing therein; the various literary techniques she adopts to emphasise the same; and the universal appeal in her works that attracts worldwide readership.
- To equip the student with the necessary cognizance of Anita Desai's subtlety and finesse in evoking changing aspects of Nature – both human and environment – and demonstrating the contemporary angle to it.
- The main objective of this lesson is to understand and appreciate the theme, characterization, and symbols in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

### STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Introduction of the novel
- 12.2 Chapter wise summery
- 12.3 Conclusion
- 12.4 Technical terms
- 12.5 Comprehension Check Question
- 12.6 References

#### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel trifurcates into

- (1) Nanda Kaul at Carignano
- (2) Raka comes to Carignano; and
- (3) Ila Das leaves Carignano.

Each of these is a cluster of discrete divisions – 10, 21, and 13 respectively. As the title of each section suggests, the novel focuses on the three main characters. Each chapter is summarised under the sub-sub-headings with an in-depth thematic and character analysis (wherever essential) in addition to the literary strategies opted for, by the novelist.

#### 12.2 CHAPTER WISE SUMMERY

##### NANDA KAUL AT CARIGNANO

This section introduces the protagonist of the novel and within the blink of an eye, her reclusive attitude. Various thoughts flitting through the protagonist's mind reflect her disinterest in company; leave aside socialising. The imagery and other figures of speech

accentuate the alienation of the protagonist from the world around. Carignano, the cynosure of the novel, illustrates the rudimentary reality that pervades the entire plot. Its precarious position on the precipice and the surrounding flora and fauna inhabiting it are all symbols of being parched, polluted, precipitous, perilous, and beyond prediction. An alert analysis clearly reflects no nostalgic reminiscences pervading the novel; in fact the town Kasauli going native is associated with its decline. Paucity in communication or rather an inadequate inclination towards communicating is the central theme of the novel. Perceivable symbolic violence embedded in the imagery and comparisons betray the brewing catastrophe close at hand. The mention of the former residents of Carignano being mostly Europeans comprising a long line of maiden ladies; who contributed towards its aura; lends an antiquated touch to it.

### CHAPTER 1:

This chapter introduces the protagonist Nanda Kaul to the readers. She resides at Carignano dubiously disposed on a drop. She watches the postman at a distance heading towards Carignano. The arrival of the postman heralded correspondence from the outside world; which was an undesirable encroachment of privacy to Nanda Kaul. Her intense glare was intended to convey the same to him. She is impatient waiting for him to disclose his mission.

Nature is depicted to be barren and blunt with swirling winds abruptly billowing. The winds are shown to raise a dust of pine branches, curtaining Nanda Kaul from view. Her comparison to a tall, thin pine tree; and her desire to blend with the surrounding pine trees are a sweeping reference to the quality of aloofness in her. *“To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake”* evinces the emptiness she experiences. The establishment of similarity between Nanda Kaul and the pine trees is symbolic of the existentialist theme of the novel. The description of Carignano being poised perilously; with plains stretched out on one side; and the distant, snow clad Himalayas on the other contribute to the tenor of the novel’s backdrop. Some apricot trees close to the house and the bright apricots are the illusive mirages that instil some life into the surroundings. The cicadas, hoopoes and eagles are the feathery benefaction to the otherwise sombre scene. The hoopoes feeding their nestlings is an unsavoury sight for Nanda Kaul; disclosing an indistinct and insipid past. A metaphorical analogy of the postman with a bullock more than once is a two-point indicator towards his industrious nature and Nanda Kaul’s repugnance of the message bearing beast of burden.

### CHAPTER 2:

This section provides the history of Carignano. It was built in 1843 by one Colonel Macdougall; as a sojourn from the hot military cantonment at Ambala; for his wife Alice and their children. After their death; a pastor, of the only Church in Kasauli, lived in it with his wife, who throughout her life tried to murder him. Though he died a peaceful death the pastor, was believed to inhabit Carignano as a ghost. The next occupant was a Miss Appleby, an eccentric lady who wouldn’t tolerate anything she didn’t like; even if it were marigolds in her garden. She preceded many other maidens – Miss Lawrence, the two Hughes sisters, Miss Jane Shrewsbury, Miss Weaver and Miss Polson. The Hughes sisters decorated the house and planted a yellow rose creeper scaling up the banister. Miss Weaver and Miss Polson hosted many tea parties to the English soldiers. The advent of 1947 halted the white successors at Carignano; which when put up for sale, was bought by Nanda Kaul.



This section has deep undercurrents of violence flowing camouflaged in black humour. One such is the story of replacing the iron roof sheets of Carignano but not the head of a coolie; after the thunderstorm that whipped out the corrugated iron roof-sheets of Carignano propelled them across a great distance hacking the head of a sheltering coolie.

Another of the stories was that of the pastor's wife's various attempts to murder him poisoning his tea and plunging her kitchen knife into him; but ironically meeting a gory death by slipping and plunging down a cliff. The third such incident involved a lady called Miss Jane Shrewsbury, who concocted various remedies for scorpion bites and used them on innocent villagers, claiming instant cure. One case involved the lady plunging her fork into the throat of a man who was choking on a mutton bone, with a belief that it would make an aperture for him to breathe; but he met with a horrendous death.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

This chapter introduces us to the harbinger of unwelcome intrusion, the postman; and the only character, other than the three female characters; Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das; who is constantly and continuously present throughout the novel. He is Ram Lal the cook.

The postman waits at the foot of the steep hill that led to Carignano, for Ram Lal who was approaching from the market. They both carry their loads; one on his back and the other in his hand. The postman tries to make conversation with Ram Lal asking about the arrival of guests at Carignano; but receives a negative reply. His derisive laugh is silenced by Ram Lal's cold stare. The repentant postman delivers his letter and leaves the place. Nanda Kaul holding the letter in her hand, walks up to her cane chair in the veranda resolving not to agree to anything in the letter.

The postman likening to a donkey, another burden bearing animal; is to be noted. The military discipline the postman is accustomed to; being an ex-serviceman; does not allow him to hand over the letter to Ram Lal and leave from the base of the steep hill. His decision to walk up the last strip of journey uphill and deliver the letter personally shows his commitment in discharging his duties. Moreover it brings to fore the differences that prevail between civil and military people.

### **CHAPTER 4:**

This chapter discloses the news of the forthcoming arrival of Nanda Kaul's great granddaughter, Raka to Carignano. Tara, Nanda Kaul's granddaughter and her daughter Asha's daughter; was going through a wrecked marriage. Her husband least bothered about her, got drunk and had many affairs. She was often beaten to pulp. Raka, Tara's daughter had just managed to recover from a near fatal typhoid attack. As Tara's husband was transferred to Geneva, Asha convinced Tara to accompany her husband; and Rakesh to take his wife Asha along with him. This left Raka, alone in her grandmother's care. But Asha had already been summoned by Vina, another of her daughters, to Bombay; to attend to her confinement. As Raka was advised rest in a hilly area, Asha reveals the fact that she and Tara decided that it would be the best to send Raka to Carignano; until Tara settled down at Geneva.

After receiving the letter Nanda Kaul simply holds herself from opening it. She coolly looks around the expanse of scenery from the veranda of her house. The blooming geraniums and fuchsias in pots; the quarrelling bub-buls; the indefatigable yet flimsy cicadas continue

droning in the dark. The sound made by these cicadas appeared to emerge from the earth and the season that emitted scents in the form of fresh pine needles. We are also introduced to the second most important character in the novel, Raka. She had been convalescing from typhoid. That was the physical health status of the girl. The handwriting of Asha is mentioned to be contrary to her character. The words themselves echoed the aggressive nature of the writer. Nanda Kaul's tight pursing of lips in contempt while reading the letter demonstrate her disagreement to Asha's line of argument. The complaining voice of Asha's tone in the letter precisely points out to her deficiency in motherly skills. A continuous reference to insects only emphasise Nanda Kaul's disapproval of entertaining guests at Carignano. The chapter ends with her vehemently decrying the interfering attitude of her daughter.

### **CHAPTER 5:**

This section is the first of its kind in illuminating the past life of Nanda Kaul. She deliberates upon the situations she faced throughout life – the hurry and worry involved in a hustle bustle life. Standing leaning on the railing behind the house she recollects the house she lorded over. The number of children, servants, ayahs, guests; the get-togethers, meetings she had to tackle at any given time and at very short notices– all elapse in her mind's eye; leaving her in consternation. As the wife of the Vice Chancellor of Punjab University she was always the centre of humdrum activity. She was exasperated at the way in which she had to enact the unfolding drama. The mere thought of encountering similar situations at an age when she wanted peace of mind was by itself pushing her into desolation.

Various symbols like that of the withered yellow rose creeper, the gashed gullies and gorges throwing out spikes and thorns were all a contrast to the perfunctory and scuttling life she led as the wife of a Vice Chancellor. They carry a deep meaning within them. Past was undisciplined but pompous; while the present was disciplined but bare. Delinquent and defiant children, disorderly servants and unpredictable stream of visitors turned her life to an ordeal and agony. After successful completion of her obligatory duties, she retired to enjoy a peaceful life at Carignano; which she now feels she is being denied by the interfering intrusion of her daughter. Her wish to be an eagle stretching its wings and drifting across the skies with eyes closed obviously reflects her feeling of isolation. The gorge being described as “plunging, blood-red down to the silver plain” seems to foretell the calamity in the near future.

### **CHAPTER 6:**

As Nanda Kaul sits down in her cane chair, the telephone that seldom rang at Carignano rings. Nanda is disinterested in receiving the call and wishes not to answer. But on second thoughts of having done with the agony, she answers it; only to be greeted by a very hoarse voice that jarred, pierced and screeched in her ears. Immediate recognition dawns on her and she recognises Ila Das, her childhood friend, on the other side. She wonders as to whether Ila Das ever realised her voice to be her cataclysm. The third important character is introduced to the readers and it may be seen that she appears to be an extrovert. Her shrill and stinging voice cannot be escaped from and Nanda Kaul feels herself to be a worm being dismembered. Ila volunteers to visit Nanda Kaul. Nanda as a part of her evasive strategy informs her that she would be busy with arrangements to receive her great granddaughter. This excites Ila; and she requests again. Nanda Kaul avoids her by replying that she herself would inform her the date. Ila Das at the other end is a bit shaken up by the rude hanging up of the phone; but convinces herself that it was an error in the communication system.

The use of imagery throughout the novel symbolises the violent undercurrents predicting the lives of ‘unloved’ and ‘unlived’ principal characters. In continuation with the same tone Anita Desai introduces the prey-predator concept. An atmosphere of remote rumination persists through numerous images especially like the one in this chapter.

“...Nanda Kaul turned her head this way and that in an effort to escape. She watched the white hen drag out a worm inch by resisting inch from the ground till it snapped in two. She felt like the worm herself, she winced at its mutilation.” This image is suggestive of both the inner turmoil Nanda Kaul faced in her past and the present realisation of the harsh realities of life that prevail.

#### **CHAPTER 7:**

Nanda Kaul is taking her afternoon nap. She tries to maintain her poise even while lying down. Trying to screen the light she closes her eyes tight. This does not turn off the buzzing sounds of the flies or the shrill, humming sounds of the cicadas outside. Nanda Kaul’s siesta is disturbed by the parrots; and her thoughts that run back several years in time.

She sees in her mind’s eye the catnap she took in the late afternoons were a part of training herself to cut off from the daily obligations. It was meant to be a time where the entire household knew they had to keep quiet. Though light was concealed out of vision, sounds penetrated easily. Nanda Kaul is shown to experience the weight of heat and the sounds that seemed to emanate from it. On waking up she immediately goes back to her duties, which she performs with perfunctory but obligatory discipline. She tries to keep herself out of the vortex of the endless maelstrom of her daily duties. Recollecting a moment where she managed to secure momentary peace even during those hectic hours; Nanda Kaul is shown as a person who never liked company.

The manner in which she compares herself to a burnt tree or a lizard or a broken marble wall in a desert in order to avoid irritation and annoyance; is to be considered. This aspect of comparison to insentient objects only deepens the great trials of the protagonist in trying to steel herself from being affected by mundane happenings. The images and symbols used are indicators of nefarious activities in the near future.

#### **CHAPTER 8:**

This chapter also is a monologue like the previous one where Nanda Kaul is trying to recall her previous phase of hectic life as the Vice Chancellor’s wife. Drinking afternoon tea, she reads *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, which again talks of a woman living alone. She ruminates on her desire to get the view from Carignano painted by an English artist; doubting an Indian artist’s skill. The picture of the scenery needing a definite outline to be painted, a delineated sketch to be etched is in her mind. But as she watches the scene she finds the hills melted into sky, sky into snow and snow into air. This provides a hazy picture, a bleak future.

As night falls, she is able to see the lights on far away hills; in and around Kasauli. She led quite a busy life trying to keep track of the number of children they had; and their schools and teachers and books and activities; the number of visitors that flowed into the house continuously; the number of trees in the garden from which children plucked fruits or fell off them; the number of guests that regularly occupied all the spare beds in the house.

The state of nimity the protagonist undergoes is joyfully discarded when the time arrives.

Having discarded and discharged her obligations properly, Nanda Kaul is now not ready to take it up once again. She strongly doubts if Raka's arrival would breach her solitariness resisting herself from being pulled into the unwanted again.

### **CHAPTER 9:**

Nanda Kaul is forced to accept the arrival of her great granddaughter Raka; and this she does by instructing Ram Lal about it. They ponder for a while on the lunch to be prepared for Raka; finally deciding on chips and tomato ketchup. Initially Nanda Kaul recalls the early days of her husband's death; when she is accompanied by her children to Carignano and left there. As they had been taught to take up responsibilities they could not stay long with her and she is happy to be left alone. Her interest in the house was to keep it as empty as possible rather than fill it up with unnecessary things; just as she wanted to remain empty and aloof to all emotions and attachments. The imagery used within indicate again the existentialism in Nanda Kaul – her detachment, disinterestedness and delinquency.

### **CHAPTER 10:**

This is the last chapter of the first of the triad. Each of these chapters is the thought monologue of Nanda Kaul; wherein we are introduced to her past life bit by bit. In this chapter we come to know that Nanda Kaul has no count of the number of great grand children she has. She tries to picture how Raka looks; but to no avail. She is waiting for Raka; dreading the amount of responsibility she'll have to take for her – right from making the child eat healthy to precautionary measures while playing. As she had maintained a reclusive relationship with her neighbours all these years; she was not sure she could break that barrier now. The only past life that clung on to her all these years was Ila Das.

This chapter portrays the nature of Nanda Kaul. She was a person who took duty very seriously. This actually may be seen in her as a wife and mother. The same which had been lying dormant after she moved to Carignano; is slowly brought to life once she knows she cannot avoid accepting her great granddaughter. The snort of disgust that escapes her on the thought of Ila Das being invited is enough proof that she does not cherish company any more. She has grown to love her solitude and she doesn't want it to be burst.

### **RAKA COMES TO CARIGNANO**

This triad deals with the arrival of Raka at Carignano; how she settles down; the individual alienation of Nanda Kaul and Raka; the slow change that occurs in Nanda Kaul; spotting similarities between the two; Nanda Kaul's fanciful stories to entertain Raka; their walks and talks; and finally fixing a date for the meeting of Ila Das and Nanda Kaul at Carignano.

### **CHAPTER 1:**

'Raka' meant the moon. But it was a misnomer when attributed to Raka; who was neither round-faced nor calm or radiant. She was a very thin girl who had large, protruding eyes and resembled a cricket or a minute mosquito. Her hair was cropped and feet dusty. She was silent and cautiously watched her surrounding. For the first time she is able to feel the *voice of silence*; something which she had never been aware of. A perfunctory hug on

meeting and superficial question of concern about how thin Raka appeared were the only signs that occurred between the great grandmother and granddaughter. Both size up the other as an adversary; Nanda Kaul's disapproval of intrusion and Raka's apprehension about the ensuing phase of her life leave behind vibrations of anxiety and foreboding. The persistent use of insects, burnt pine trees as imagery only harbingers the impending disaster.

## CHAPTER 2:

This chapter brings to fore the inquisitive nature of Raka. The minute she is left to herself she tries to explore her surroundings. Beginning with her bare feet experiencing the floor; she scrutinizes every minute aspect of the room. She is drawn to the window by the rays of the sun and the railing just above the ravine. The plains blanketed in yellow dust; discarded tins, newspapers, peels, rags and bones; pine trees charred, twisted and distorted into various theatrical poses; rocks suspended; randomly shining rooftops; servants quarters, factory belching out its waste – were all a part of her new found domain; which she felt she had to investigate. She tries to approach Ram Lal to ask questions but he is found sprawled out on his cot, snoozing. She also sees the club and a couple of villages, Dagshai and Sabathu, lying at the foot of this hill.

A mention of the beauties of the Himalayan scenery is blotted with the pictures of disgruntled forms of buildings like clubs and factories. Frequent imagery referring to insects, vultures, pollutants, fire, charred trees – everything is a precursor to the imminent gloom.

## CHAPTER 3:

This chapter gives us an insight into the working of the factory, Raka has seen. Ram Lal tells her that it is the Pasteur's Institute where doctors made serum for injections especially against dog bites. On Raka enquiring about the reason for emission of large amounts of smoke, Ram Lal interprets it to the quantum of serum that is produced for the whole country. He cautions her against going down the ravine; which he strongly believes to be haunted by jackals and ghosts. The teatime interlude between conversationally penurious Nanda Kaul and taciturn Raka reveals the first hint of similarity between the two. The reticent and withdrawn Raka is further pushed into uncertainty by Ram Lal's general word of caution.

The common mistake committed by elders of trying to frighten children from indulging in dangerous tasks is repeated by Ram Lal; when he mentions jackals, bones of dead animals and ghosts of people who died of dog and snake bites to Raka's inquisitive queries. The effect of the caution words is to be seen in the succeeding chapters; but a hint of it is given in the following lines – *Her great grandmother was left to interpret the motion as she wished* – Raka's resolute and stubborn nature is obvious. Nanda Kaul's negligible effort to draw Raka into a conversation fails and she ponders whether to constrain or unshackle the swirling of her great granddaughter. The comparison of Raka to a thousand black mosquitoes humming and Nanda Kaul's unwillingness to be drawn into a child's world clearly reflect that Raka was still the unwelcome visitor.

## CHAPTER 4:

This chapter is significant for two important realisations that dawn on Nanda Kaul. The first is, Raka was a perfect model of rejection that came naturally, instinctively and effortlessly; and the second, a slight change occurs in the outlook of Nanda Kaul towards Raka. Nanda Kaul is amazed and perturbed at the rejection that came naturally to Raka; while

she had to plan and wilfully implement her rejection of the child. The sudden and silent disappearances of the child drew her out into a position where she had to interest herself in the child's activities and take responsibility for their consequences. Nanda Kaul writes a letter to Asha informing her of the safe arrival of Raka; but cautious enough not to divulge her grievance. Nanda Kaul while watching Raka on her escapades realises the great similarity between them. In fact by the end of the chapter a small amount of appreciation seems to raise itself in her heart for Raka.

#### CHAPTER 5:

Raka's journey down into the ravine and back up again towards Carignano form the gist of the chapter. She drops down lower and lower finding the climate turn hotter and hotter. She is able to see the filth that was discarded at the Pasteur's Institute. She is able to smell the odours of all animal matter. She happens to come across a big, yellow snake slithering and leaves it to bask in the sun. Immune to the slash on her thigh by an agave; she starts hauling herself up to Carignano. But a slight miscalculation lands her in the club's premises. Floundering on realising her error, she quickly notices that the club was empty and she rushes out of the gate onto the road that led to Carignano.

#### CHAPTER 6:

Ram Lal is boiling water in a big brass drum boiler for Raka to bathe. She lands on him sliding down the knoll. She tells him of her little adventures – about the snake she had seen and is instantly warned to stay away from those places. A dust storm brews up suddenly and Ram Lal pulls her inside into the kitchen. He is worried about the boiler tripping over. But luckily nothing happens and the dust storm subsides as quickly as it started.

This chapter brings to light a communicative Raka; quite contrary to the Raka who is almost mute with Nanda Kaul. She is curious about the stories he has got to tell her and know more about the surrounding areas. The moment he starts cautioning her; the change in her is visible – she starts fidgeting. Ram Lal too belongs to a different generation and the gap between his and the next appears really wide. The imagery used in this chapter is again indicative of the looming holocaust in the near future. *The sun was bobbing in and out of the dust clouds, lighting them up in a great conflagration – a splendid bonfire that burned in the heart of the yellow clouds. The whole world was livid, inflamed.* These images bring before the mind's eye the lurking symbolism of fire; which is believed to be not only a destructive force but also a purifying factor.

A clue to the regular occurrences of fire outbreak in Kasauli is given through Ram Lal's anxiety that the boiler might overturn and the dry grass around, catch fire. A careful observation shows Raka not to be frightened but interested. More particulars of how the fire engines reached the place but could not put out the fire due to lack of water is digested by Raka earnestly. She is curious to listen to the howling of jackals too!

#### CHAPTER 7:

Nanda Kaul accompanies Raka on her evening walk in this scene. Raka feels trapped. Her unencumbered movements in search of sights and sounds turn illusive with her great grandmother accompanying her. Nanda Kaul suggests that they go to the Monkey Point, the highest peak therein. The images of a serene background blotted out by fire ravaged houses and huge scientific equipment are all indications of deteriorating Nature; and the uncontrolled, undisciplined and malignant profusion of monsters of civilisations

contaminating the basic necessities of life – air and water. Nanda Kaul's reminiscences of the initial years when she first came to Kasauli and its pristine beauty then; of how she was reminded of G.M. Hopkins' poem and the depravity that has set in since then – are all shared with a small girl. Talking of young boys and girls in a local school; Nanda Kaul asks Raka if she was eager to go to school in Kasauli. This comes as a bolt out of the blue for Raka; who is not ready to be shackled to discipline, orderliness and obedience. She simply ignores the suggestion and runs downhill leaving her great grandmother behind. Nanda Kaul is taken aback at the rude rejection of the invitation to make Carignano Raka's home. The slow change in Nanda Kaul becomes visibly imminent; but Raka remains the same.

### **CHAPTER 8:**

This chapter sees Raka climbing the Monkey Point all alone; while Nanda Kaul remains seated at the foot of the hill. Raka is highly displeased to climb the Monkey Point under the supervision of her great grandmother. She had planned to do it all by herself. She in fact is seething in anger and disgust with Nanda Kaul's interference and camouflaged concern at being accompanied and suggested to join school at Kasauli. The nimble movement with which Raka manages to climb up the rocks and avoid a collision with a herd of goats; are all anxiously watched by Nanda Kaul. Finally Raka reaches the highest point from where she is able to see miles around. The wind is trying to blow her off; but she holds on with an impulse to spread her hands like the wings of an eagle; and take off into the skies. The imagery of an eagle again hints at the probable voracity for freedom; unshackling oneself from the mundane problems of humanity. The inbuilt aloofness coupled with an self-imposed solitary confinement in Raka are but vociferous symbolic screams of neglect and violence.

### **CHAPTER 9:**

Nanda Kaul's suggestion that Raka visit the club and her query whether she had been taken to any place by her parents; bring back stifled memories for Raka. She visualises her father's unsuccessful attempts in trying to improve her social network and the succeeding illness due to which she was left bedridden for months. Slowly recovering from the reverie she questions her great grandmother's disinterestedness in visiting the club. This actually draws Nanda Kaul from her guarded mood. She laughs aloud acknowledging the similarities between them. Raka is astounded at the blatant disclosure of truth. She who liked doing things in secrecy was simply awe-struck at the outburst from her great grandmother. Nanda Kaul also senses this instantly and tries to repair the damage by retreating to her former pedestal of authority, age and composure.

Each, in the process of diverting attention from what was spoken start watching the hoopoe trying to feed its fledglings. As the apricots had been over the hoopoe was catching moths in mid air and feeding her little ones. When it remains clear off the nest and hoots from the apricot tree, Raka suggests they move away so that the hoopoe could feed its babies.

### **CHAPTER 10:**

Ram Lal recites stories of the English ladies who partied at the club ages ago and about the military then that kept partying regularly. He speaks about there being a difference; but what the difference was, could not be elucidated by Ram Lal. Raka, when she hears music that night, decides to pay a visit to the clubhouse. She wears a sweater over her pyjamas and quickly goes down her usual unobtrusive way. She sees hairy young men playing billiard; but she is actually frightened. She who had no fear of the dark or jackals

detests human beings. Imagining fancy balls as Ram Lal told her, she peeps through the misty windowpanes.

### **CHAPTER 11:**

Peeping in, Raka is shocked at the scene she sees. The party did not have fanciful and fairy shapes dancing; but grotesquely dressed people. The clamour and cacophony along with the brutal, horrible and odious mass of savages swaggering and leaping to the music drives her crazy and she tries to escape. But she is immediately transported to her past where her father often returned from parties, tipsy and beat up her mother; who lay squashed at her feet.

She sees herself urinating in her clothes in terror. References to a violent past that scarred the emotions of a young Raka; are but proofs of broken homes breeding insensitive, unresponsive and unappreciative children. The truth that happy homes are the foundation of a stable society is tangentially referred to here.

### **CHAPTER 12:**

The scene Raka witnessed at the clubhouse has had an embarrassing effect on her. The change is observed by Nanda Kaul. She tried to appear nonchalant but not totally. When Nanda Kaul suggests Raka to go on a pony ride; she does not display the usual enthusiasm shown youngsters of her age. She shows disinterest because of the pony man who accompanies the rider. Every aspect reflects the existentialism Anita wishes to portray. The aversion to company, however minor it may be, is seen here. When Raka realises that the copper glow blooming in the east was not the full moon but a forest fire, she starts palpitating, whether in fear or expectation, is left to imagination. She is highly restless and starts fidgeting. She continues with the same annoying restiveness throughout the night; being fully aware of her great grandmother's wakefulness. She is found sleeping on the couch in the living room, the next day morning.

The nightmares in the slender past of Raka keep pursuing her. She has turned highly insensitive to any feeling. The forest fire fails to instil any sympathy in her; instead a curiosity to pursue the line of its spread may be observed. The imagery of the hills remaining blotted out by smoke and summer haze are but an indication of the tragic end.

### **CHAPTER 13:**

Nanda Kaul finds that Raka just clung onto Ram Lal. Every evening they would sit and watch the eagles soar and glide in the gorge and over the plains. They were quite comfortable in each other's company. Ram Lal keeps cautioning Raka against going down alone. In this chapter he mentions 'churails' – those beings living among the dead. He further describes them as being big and dressed in black. The surest way to confirm was to observe their feet, which were always turned backwards. But when Raka asks as to how she could observe the feet in the dark, Ram Lal speaks against Raka trying to do it; for according to him that would result in Raka turning into a stone. He promises to take her and show her a woman who had turned into a stone. The approach of langurs suddenly diverts the topic. They tear at the trees and even barge into kitchen grabbing at potatoes. Many of the little herdsboys rush into the garden and start throwing stones at them to frighten them away. All the langurs are chased away except a mother with a baby langur clinging on to her. When Ram Lal tries to drive it away, Raka stops him. Nanda Kaul watches all this and for momentarily feels pain at the way Raka ignores her in preference to Ram Lal.



**CHAPTER 14:**

A letter bringing information about Asha flying to Switzerland to attend to Tara, who had faced another break-down and admitted into a nursing home; arrives. Nanda Kaul is unhappy and hides the letter in her desk. She is uncertain about what to do. She notices that Raka has so far never bothered to ask if she had received any letters. She was quite comfortable with being alone. She is actually unaware of her dependence on Nanda Kaul.

The letter puts more pressure on Nanda Kaul; who experiences an additional sense of Raka's dependence on her. She even visualises Raka as being the heir to Carignano. Though she prefers bequeathing the property to Raka; she is not ready to entertain a lawyer for that. She is neither willing to allow anybody into the house nor even out of the house.

Nanda Kaul's preference to staying alone is in fact challenged with the arrival of Raka. A slow change occurs in the perception of Nanda Kaul. One of the reasons might be the similarity between Nanda Kaul and Raka. She somehow develops a sense of responsibility towards Raka; though she keeps warning and controlling herself often. Another important feature that crops up during the course of the novel is that contrary to her original feelings of aloofness; Nanda Kaul starts feeling pain at being ignored by Raka. Though she visualises Raka as a child who avoids being the centre of attraction; she is conscious that she herself is not one for Raka.

**CHAPTER 15:**

There is a sudden climatic change and thundershowers start lashing Kasauli. Nanda Kaul and Raka are forced to go inside. Restless Raka touches a bronze Buddha on the table top and Nanda Kaul starts narrating the story of how her father managed to get the bronze Buddha. The story of Nanda Kaul's father travelling to Tibet as an explorer on his horse Suleiman and with his dog Demon for many years is described in detail. She is finally able to capture the interest of Raka. When Nanda Kaul tells her about the sorcerers her father met in the course of his travels; Raka is bewildered. She wants to know if he wrote a book; and Nanda Kaul's negative reply disappoints her.

The description picturing the travels of her father gives a deep insight into the government rules prevailing then as well as the climate of the surrounding areas. People were not allowed to go to Tibet as and when they wanted; they had to take government permission. The mode of travel was horses; and the things of import and export like musk, turquoise, coral, silver, gold – are all explained. A mention of sorcerers brings to light the deep-rooted superstitious beliefs in them.

**CHAPTER 16:**

The rain subsides and the surroundings are transformed from the otherwise plain and dry backdrop into enchantingly pristine blue and lucid skies; and greenish, moist woods. The incredible alteration the rain brings about to the surroundings is indeed amazing. Nanda Kaul is reminded of Tara's singing whenever she visited Carignano; and repeats the words "*Rainy days are lily days*" to Raka; who in turn, is baffled by them. Her displeasure on recollecting the contents of the letter written by Asha is visible in the last lines.

The onset of a sudden storm is an indication of the unpredictable future. The wondrous change is a harbinger of the probable transformation sought by the younger

generation. The manner in which Nanda Kaul picks up *The Travels of Marco Polo* and replaces it on the shelf rouse a certain amount of doubt in the minds of the readers. The genuineness of the story she recites about her father's adventures in Tibet is at stake. The versatile manner in which she modifies the story to capture the interest of Raka may be vaguely felt.

#### **CHAPTER 17:**

This chapter ensures that Raka realises the truth in her mother's singing "*Rainy days are lily days*". The moment Raka wakes up and looks out, she is perplexed at the extent of pink delight in front of her eyes. Overnight the lilies had blossomed and it was simply spectacular. Ram Lal had managed to cut some lilies and put them into a milk jug on the table; with the pollen spilt all over the tablecloth. Raka's questions about her mother's frequent visits to Carignano are not eagerly answered by Nanda Kaul; because she was not sure she could identify her grandchildren correctly. When Raka enquires about a letter that was received; Nanda Kaul tells her that Tara had been admitted into a hospital. Nanda Kaul ponders over the truth she had disclosed. She did not have the quality to soothe a sorrow-filled heart. But the impassive face of Raka throws her into a dilemma; wherein she experiences both relief and disappointment at the same time.

#### **CHAPTER 18:**

This chapter discloses the concealed element of Raka's character. She who approaches the burnt house of the knoll is enraptured by it. The destroyed house on the ridge appealed to her turbulent spirit. The illegal resolute anarchy prevailed over her better sense.

The wrecked ruin somehow managed to inspire her. This trait of Raka's character reflects her indomitable surge for destruction. She is fact is a symbol of the new world; lonely and alienated; yet seeking a change from the barren and existentialist world. A product of a broken home, she tries to find and create values and significance for her existence. The caretaker of the burnt house calling her 'The crazy one' is in itself a proof of her preposterous and ludicrous behaviour that is visible to all. She was definitely not normal.

#### **CHAPTER 19:**

It does not take long for the pink lilies to dry up and be covered with the yellow dust.

The dry weather once again prevails. Nanda Kaul tries to engage the interest of Raka by telling her stories of her own childhood in Kashmir. She recreates the scenes where they lived in a house of the banks of the Dal Lake. She talks about the big house and the many fruit trees they had in their orchard. Her mother's desire to store as many dry fruits as she could. She speaks about her father's private zoo; which had a bear, leopard cats, dogs, tame peacocks, parrots, pangolins, lorises etc. trying to hold on to the attention of the child; which seemed to be straining the moment no action in the narrative was sighted.

Raka is perplexed with the sudden talkative nature of her grandmother. She is simply unable to understand the reason for her loquacity. She tries to break away from her great grandmother's hold; and finally accomplishes it without noticing the anxious wrinkles on her face. The feeling of alienation is strongly felt by the end of the chapter where both Nanda Kaul and Raka disengage themselves from the other in a sort of fury.

**CHAPTER 20:**

In this chapter Nanda Kaul tries to weave her fantasy world more intricately so as to be able to entice Raka in it. Raka's indifference seemed to goad her into action wherein she tries to throw a bait to Raka in order to capture her attention. But Raka is unable to understand the sudden inexplicable intimacy her great grandmother was trying to develop.

Raka could realise that the tales her great grandmother wove were all fantasies and there was no reality in it. The animals she personally had were also felt to be a part of the yarn she spun. Raka was more attracted to the realistic scenery outside rather than the fantasy world her great grandmother spun. The rising moon disappoints Raka; for she expects it to be another forest fire. She hopes Ram Lal would release her from her great grandmother's hold; but it was not to be. Finally the yawn she lets out saddens Nanda Kaul who realises that Raka is bored.

**CHAPTER 21:**

The sluggish afternoon time was the time when Raka would go out on her adventures. Nanda Kaul realises this when she tries to peep into Raka's room. The manner in which she sought attention where she did not get it; was extremely childish. A telephone call chills her heart for some time – Nanda Kaul realises that she has to remove the telephone if she were to avoid such shocks. Ila Das calls her and they decide to meet the next day for tea at Carignano. The shrill voice of Ila Das and that of the telephone drive Nanda Kaul up the wall that her wild thumping heart warns her to be cautious. She ruminates upon herself trying to engage Raka by spinning fanciful stories, which she now regrets. The reference to Nanda Kaul taking precautionary measures to avoid a probable future shock is a pointer towards the impending disaster.

**12.3 CONCLUSION**

The plot of *Fire on the Mountain* is relatively brief and uncomplicated, the significant action occurring within the psyches of Nanda and, to a lesser extent, Raka, her great-granddaughter. When Ila Das is raped and killed, that violent action happens "offstage" at the end of the novel, almost simultaneously with Raka's announcement that she has set the forest on fire. While there are few important "events" in the rest of the novel, Anita Desai prepares the reader for the horrific ending by carefully embedding violence in her imagery and in her symbolism. In effect, the "fire" metaphorically smolders within her characters before it literally ignites at the end of the novel.

*Fire on the Mountain* is a superbly crafted novel, known for its rich symbolic imagery and psychological insights. A winner of two prestigious awards, it tells the story of two older women and a young girl. The first part of the novel takes the reader inside the mind of Nanda Kaul, the aged protagonist. The widow of a university vice chancellor and once at the hub of a large, demanding family and a hectic social life, she now lives in seclusion at Carignano, a desolate old house on the ridge of a mountain in Kasauli. Aloof, indifferent, and irritable, she wants no intrusion to violate her privacy. Her cloistered life is threatened when she receives a letter announcing an impending visit by her great-granddaughter Raka and when a telephone call comes from her childhood friend Ila Das, who wishes to visit her.

The second part of the novel shows the tense relationship between Nanda Kaul and Raka. A recluse, Raka has the habit of slipping away into her own private world, ignoring her

great-grandmother completely. Haunted by nightmarish memories of a drunken, violent father and an unhappy, battered mother, she shuns human company and spends her time roaming the desolate hills and ravines like a bird or a lizard. This offers Desai an opportunity to weave symbolic nature imagery into the text of the novel.

#### 12.4 TECHNICAL TERMS

Existentialism – alienation – fantasies – adventures – eagles – soaring – winds – fire – thundershowers – dust – dryness – rigid beliefs – health problems – social evils – principles – ethics – calm – storm.

#### 12.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Examine the character sketch of Nanda Kaul.
2. Examine the character sketch of Raka.
3. How does the personality of Ila Das differ with other characters?.
4. Compare and contrast the characters of Nanda Kaul and Ila Das.
5. Raka is a mirror image of Nanda Kaul. Elucidate.
6. Explain the significance of the title *Fire on the Mountain*.

#### 12.6 REFERENCE BOOKS

1. Anita, Desai: "*Fire on the Mountain*" Gurgaon: Random house publications, 2008 edition
2. [www.enotes.com/Fire on the Mountain](http://www.enotes.com/Fire-on-the-Mountain) , domain dated 31-10-2015

**Dr. Usha Sharma**

## LESSON 13

# FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN-II – ANITA DESAI

### OBJECTIVES

#### THIS IS PART 2 OF THE NOVEL ANALYSIS

- To enable the students acquire an understanding of Anita Desai's novels; wherein she endeavours to discover facts of life; draw one's attention to it; and finally reveal the essence and relevance of things
- To facilitate the students appreciate and comprehend her approach to life and its diverse predicaments; the manner in which she projects the human relationships and the complexities prevailing therein; the various literary techniques she adopts to emphasise the same; and the universal appeal in her works that attracts worldwide readership.
- To equip the student with the necessary cognizance of Anita Desai's subtlety and finesse in evoking changing aspects of Nature – both human and environment – and demonstrating the contemporary angle to it.
- The main objective of this lesson is to understand and appreciate the theme, characterization, and symbols in the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

### STRUCTURE

- 13.1 Introduction of the novel
- 13.2 Chapter wise summery
- 13.3 Interpretation and analysis
- 13.4 Conclusion
- 13.5 Technical terms
- 13.6 Comprehension Check Question
- 13.7 References

#### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel trifurcates into

- (1) Nanda Kaul at Carignano
- (2) Raka comes to Carignano; and
- (3) Ila Das leaves Carignano.

Each of these is a cluster of discrete divisions – 10, 21, and 13 respectively. As the title of each section suggests, the novel focuses on the three main characters. Each chapter is summarised under the sub-sub-headings with an in-depth thematic and character analysis (wherever essential) in addition to the literary strategies opted for, by the novelist.

#### 13.2 CHAPTER WISE SUMMERY

In the previous lesson 9 we have examined the first two parts of the novel, in this lesson we can see and analyse the third and important part of the novel where action takes place unexpected twists and turns.

## **ILA DAS LEAVES CARIGNANO**

### **CHAPTER 1:**

Nanda Kaul is waiting for her childhood friend, Ila Das. It is decided they meet for tea; but Ila Das is late, as usual; from what we come to know of Nanda Kaul's words. They are all waiting for Ila Das to come for tea. Raka and Ram Lal are also waiting. Nanda Kaul is unhappy to have her tea late. Meanwhile the third important character in the novel is introduced in person.

As Ila Das walks up to Carignano, a group of boys precede her. They keep teasing her and she in her hoarse and cracked voice keeps calling them 'monkeys'; and threatens to report them to their principal, whom she knew very well. But they are incited by her voice and pull her umbrella and try to throw it down the hill. But it is caught in the rails; refusing to be bundled down. The imagery of a broken umbrella, reflecting Ila Das's dreary past further portrays her adamant nature when it refuses to be thrown over from the hill. Finally Ram Lal rescues her umbrella and she manages to reach Carignano.

### **CHAPTER 2:**

This chapter gives us an insight into Ila Das's life. Nanda Kaul reminisces on their friendship from the time they were babies. Readers are shown Ila Das as a child; how royally her family lived with their bungalow teeming with servants and ayahs attending on them. Their school days are also recollected; and Nanda Kaul is reminded of the single jarring note that unified the entire life of Ila Das – her voice. She had a voice that, according to Nanda Kaul, nobody else had. The minute she opened her mouth to recite nursery rhymes or lessons and poems in the classroom; she was hushed up. She was simply forced to hush up. Ila Das's parents on realising their daughter's handicap; bought a piano and engaged a teacher, to teach her. They saw this could avoid Ila Das from reciting and she could play instead. Nanda Kaul receives her; Ila Das is genuinely happy to see her childhood friend again; Ila Das's beacon light throughout her troubled life.

Ila Das, as is slowly revealed, is quite a contradictory character. Her voice was her scourge. There are many images that indicate the sincerity of her character. Though she is portrayed as an absurd personality, physically; underneath there resided a person of self-respect.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

Meeting Nanda Kaul excites Ila Das so much that she is full of appreciation for the apricot trees and the mansion like Carignano. Ram Lal on the other hand is struggling to remember the niceties to be followed at a tea party; for it had been quite some time they had one at Carignano. Ila Das meets Raka in this chapter and is simply presumptuous in the way she greets her. She rushes towards Raka and kisses her on her cheek. Raka is dumbfounded; while Nanda Kaul is surprised and jubilant at the same time – surprised that Ila Das dared to kiss Raka on her cheek and jubilant that there was somebody who could forcefully penetrate into that thick shield of Raka's isolated life. Finally they all sit down to tea.

The imagery of Raka being likened to an insect in general and mosquito in particular give us the physical features as well as her psyche. Ila Das claiming to be family for the sole reason that she had known Nanda Kaul for years reflects not only her affection for Nanda Kaul but also her dependence on her.

**CHAPTER 4:**

Ila Das slips into their past days. She recounts to Raka that Nanda Kaul's house had been a veritable paradise for children. They could do anything – eating nuts, hanging from branches like monkeys, riding bicycles, playing with dogs, playing badminton; virtually anything. Then she is suddenly reminded of the piano and the music they played on it after tea. Her abrupt switching over to imaginary playing on the piano startles Raka and horrifies Nanda Kaul. They are stupefied and remain glued to their seats in sheer agony. On careful observation it may be found that Ila Das knew she was awful in her imaginary, musical recital; but her vigour and enthusiasm are difficult to be controlled.

**CHAPTER 5:**

Ila Das is unstoppable; both Nanda Kaul and Raka are bored and tired of the game of talking about old tea time stories. Nanda Kaul was resolute not to encourage Ila Das in any way; but nothing could dampen Ila Das' s exuberance. She tries to impress Raka with the stories of glory about Nanda Kaul. But Raka on the contrary feels confined and controlled. She just wishes to escape out where she could find contentment in seeing the burnt house or birds and cicadas singing. She welcomed a forest flare, which would ultimately burn everything and retain ashes.

This is her innate wish, which reflects her tendency for alienation, destruction and purgation. Ila Das on the other hand is immune to the reactions of her listeners and proceeds with her recital. She talks about the Vice Chancellor's house that was a beehive of activity in her days. She talks of its never closing doors, the tea and lemonade parties, the piano singing, the badminton matches, the fruit trees yielding fresh, ripe and luscious fruit during different seasons. At a particular point when talking about the badminton matches she mentions a Miss David as being a partner of the Vice Chancellor during the mixed doubles matches. Raka is surprised to note the abrupt halt to Ila Das's speech. A sudden silence descends on the scene, the reason being undistinguishable by Raka.

**CHAPTER 6:**

Nanda Kaul takes charge of the situation and sends out Raka to call Ram Lal to clean up the tea things. Then she diverts the topic and asks Ila to speak about her present life. The chapter carries the story of Ila Das. Her brothers were sent to foreign universities only to squander money given to them. Her father tried to pay back the debts by selling away his property. By the time he died there was nothing left. Ila' s mother was bedridden due to her broken hip and Rima used to give piano lessons to earn their daily bread. It was during this time that Nanda Kaul secures a job for Ila through her husband. But as luck would have it Ila Das resigns the job after some time. After that she faces many problems to make both ends meet. On Nanda Kaul's advice she completes a course in social work and secures a job at the Himalayan foothills as a social worker. Their paths cross again but the only change is that Nanda Kaul is no more the presiding deity but a retired recluse.

**CHAPTER 7:**

Nanda Kaul enquires Ila whether she's able to make enough to survive; and the piteous tale that follows shows that she is in a position where a paltry amount of even thirty rupees also mattered. Besides herself, she has to take care of her sister Rima who presently shares a bed in their ex-nanny's house in Calcutta; with the little amount she earns as a social worker. Listening to her Nanda Kaul is moved and has to make a lot of effort to stop herself from asking Ila to stay with her. Raka watching Ila's bobbing head is reminded of her experience of witnessing the party at the club and all the weird creatures that made merry

there. The pathetic situation in which Ila lived and the manner in which she continued to hold on to her principles draw our appreciation.

Her remarks that they were supposed to have been given the best in their childhood – best education, living style and status – all prove to come to nothing in the present times. The fact that their education taught them nothing about the world or its ways; and how to survive the battle reflect the shortcomings of the so-called regal class people.

### **CHAPTER 8:**

This chapter brings to light Ila Das's present work as a social worker and the hurdles she faces in the process. She repudiates her words when she says that she realises she is better off than many other people who go through degradation beyond imagination. At least her upbringing, she agrees, had not allowed her to fall to such indignity. The religious beliefs of the poor class people brought misery and humiliation upon them; which they never realised. They were doomed into accepting the rigid traditional beliefs, which never allowed them to come out of the tangles of life unpunished. They were cases of health like tetanus, conjunctivitis and trachoma rendering youngsters to death and blindness; while social evils like child marriages ruined the lives of young girls. Ila Das mentions the name of one particular person Preet Singh whom she had encountered but failed to convince; against getting his seven year old daughter married to an old man who had six children for a mere quarter acre of land and a couple of goats.

Nanda Kaul meanwhile cautions Ila to be careful; while Ila laughs away the warning. Her sturdy principles do not fail to draw the admiration of readers.

### **CHAPTER 9:**

This chapter brings greater clarity to the character of Raka. Sitting on the knoll under the pine trees she watches endless hills and feels herself to be in a boat drifting loosely. Raka's imaginary world, where she exists all alone; never abandons her. She is in search of the unattainable security and stability at the cost of destroying the existing world. She sneaks up into the kitchen and steals the matchbox and silently disappears into the trees. The two old ladies are bidding each other good-bye at the gate and Raka's misdeed goes unnoticed.

### **CHAPTER 10:**

Ila Das departs from Carignano and Nanda Kaul waits for her to disappear from sight before she returns to the house. Looking at Ila's frail body; her drooping figure; and jerky gait; Nanda Kaul resorts to a defensive mode. She looks on all sides to see whether there was anybody to tease Ila; ready to pounce on them. But the lanes are empty and Ila goes down swaying jauntily; her umbrella swinging by her side. Nanda Kaul senses the precarious position Ila Das often landed herself in and wondered at how she had ever managed to scrape through; in her entire life. Nanda Kaul returns to the house; looking for Raka but knowing full well she wouldn't be seen. She spots a yellow lily in bloom and gives it a shake to throw off the praying mantis into the surrounding shrubbery.

### **CHAPTER 11:**

Ila Das decides to walk through the bazar to buy something for dinner if she could. But her walk through the bazar and her talk with the grain seller create panic in her; which she tries to shoo away laughing to herself. People, children and students all along the way poke fun and laugh at her. She, being used to their taunts and insults, walks ahead holding her



head high; thinking of her father. She would never do anything that would even shame the memory of her father. She holds her head high and starts walking back home; regretting her decision of walking through the bazar. Light seems to be disappearing fast and Ila Das tries to reach her house before light faded.

#### **CHAPTER 12:**

Ila Das walks through jerkily thinking of many things she could have done. For one she could have asked Nanda Kaul and stayed back with her at Carignano. Two she could have taken some grains from the grain seller for the night's dinner. But she realises she wouldn't do that because she was always haunted by the thought of being her father's daughter – never in debt to anyone. As she rounds off the last turning Preet Singh is upon her throttling her. She tries to disengage herself from his grasp; and when she thinks she has; she realises that he draws back his hands only to pull out the cotton scarf and choke her. Her life is slowly ebbing out when Preet Singh rapes her; and thus ends the life of Ila Das amongst the dust and goat droppings.

#### **CHAPTER 13:**

The last chapter of the novel rounds up the loose ends and solves quite a few intrigues. Ila Das's death is reported by the police officer to Nanda Kaul; who is unwilling to accept the truth. The final moment of revelation arrives and Nanda Kaul is not able to accept Ila Das's death. She traumatically realises that she had lied to her great granddaughter about her father's adventures and zoos; her husband's affection for her and everything. The truth that she was forced to stay at Carignano out of compulsion and not passion is the final revelation. Unable to bear the truth she drops dead. Little Raka, ignorant of what happened, reports of the little act of setting the fire to the forest to her nani.

### **13.3 INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS**

Anita Desai's analogy of Nanda Kaul being the mountain and little Raka being the fire appears to be apt till the last chapter is approached. The final chapter discloses the reason for the reclusive attitude of Nanda Kaul. She has been forced into it rather than by choice. All her characters despise the absurdity of their existence. On close observation it may be found that Nanda Kaul withdraws into her shell; while Raka desires for something novel; and Ila is miserable with her environment. Making Kasauli the location of her novel, Anita Desai endows it with a wider fascination; where limitations of region, religion and time desist to exist. All the three female characters are an illustration of her alter ego; providing her outlook to life.

The plot of *Fire on the Mountain* is relatively brief and uncomplicated, the significant action occurring within the psyches of Nanda and, to a lesser extent, Raka, her great-granddaughter. When Ila Das is raped and killed, that violent action happens "offstage" at the end of the novel, almost simultaneously with Raka's announcement that she has set the forest on fire. While there are few important "events" in the rest of the novel, Anita Desai prepares the reader for the horrific ending by carefully embedding violence in her imagery and in her symbolism. In effect, the "fire" metaphorically smolders within her characters before it literally ignites at the end of the novel.

### 13.4 CONCLUSION

*Fire on the Mountain* is a superbly crafted novel, known for its rich symbolic imagery and psychological insights. A winner of two prestigious awards, it tells the story of two older women and a young girl. The first part of the novel takes the reader inside the mind of Nanda Kaul, the aged protagonist. The widow of a university vice chancellor and once at the hub of a large, demanding family and a hectic social life, she now lives in seclusion at Carignano, a desolate old house on the ridge of a mountain in Kasauli. Aloof, indifferent, and irritable, she wants no intrusion to violate her privacy. Her cloistered life is threatened when she receives a letter announcing an impending visit by her great-granddaughter Raka and when a telephone call comes from her childhood friend Ila Das, who wishes to visit her.

The second part of the novel shows the tense relationship between Nanda Kaul and Raka. A recluse, Raka has the habit of slipping away into her own private world, ignoring her great-grandmother completely. Haunted by nightmarish memories of a drunken, violent father and an unhappy, battered mother, she shuns human company and spends her time roaming the desolate hills and ravines like a bird or a lizard. This offers Desai an opportunity to weave symbolic nature imagery into the text of the novel.

### 13.5 TECHNICAL TERMS

Existentialism – alienation – fantasies – adventures – eagles – soaring – winds – fire – thundershowers – dust – dryness – rigid beliefs – health problems – social evils – principles – ethics – calm – storm.

### 13.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Examine the character sketch of Nanda Kaul.
2. Examine the character sketch of Raka.
3. How does the personality of Ila Das differ with other characters?.
4. Compare and contrast the characters of Nanda Kaul and Ila Das.
5. Raka is a mirror image of Nanda Kaul. Elucidate.
6. Explain the significance of the title *Fire on the Mountain*.

### 13.7 REFERENCE BOOKS

1. Anita, Desai: “*Fire on the Mountain*” Gurgaon: Random house publications, 2008 edition
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**Dr. M.Suresh Kumar**

# LESSON 14

## THE COW OF THE BARRICADES

By Raja Rao

### OBJECTIVES

The aim of the short story “The Cow of the Barricades” gives us a picture of India's struggle for independence under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The main objective of the lesson is that the students have to know the theme of conflict, independence, struggle, control, sacrifice, peace and freedom in the Raja Rao's the cow of the barricades.

### STRUCTURE

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Summary
- 14.3 The Literary Art of Raja Rao
- 14.4 Technical/ Key words
- 14.5 Self- Assessment Questions
- 14.6 Suggested Readings

### 14.1 INTRODUCTION

Raja Rao was one of the most prominent writers in 20th-century India, known for his novels and short stories. The critic Ivar Ivask said his “greatest achievement was the perfection of the metaphysical novel.”

Rao was born in Hassan (now Karnataka), South India in 1908. His family were Kannada Brahmins, and his father was a professor of the Kannada language in Hyderabad.

Rao went to the University of Madras for undergraduate studies and France's Montpellier University to study literature for postgraduate. He also studied the French language at the Sorbonne.

He began publishing his first stories in magazines and journals in 1931, with his first novel, *Kanthapura*, coming out in 1938. When he returned to India the next year, he became involved in the nationalist movement. He laboured alongside Jawarlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, and sought his guru, Sri Atmananda, whom he met in Trivandrum, Kerala.

From 1966 to 1983, Rao lived in the United States and taught Indian philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin. Rao's works, all written in English, include the novels *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988), and short stories such as “A Client” (1934), “The Cow of the Barricades” (1938), “The Policeman and the Rose” (1963), “Jupiter and Mars” (1954), and “The Writer and the Word” (1965). He won the Neustadt prize in 1988 and the Sahitya Akademi award in 1992. In 1996, he published a series of his nonfiction writing on various topics, entitled *The Meaning of India*.

In 2000, with his approval, the Samvad Undia Foundation, a non profit charitable trust, created the "Raja Rao Award for Literature" in order to "recognize writers and scholars who have made an outstanding contribution to the Literature and Culture of the South Asian Diaspora." The award was bestowed seven times between 2000-2009, then discontinued. Rao died at the age of 92 on July 8, 2006. He married three times, the last being in 1986, and had one son.

In Raja Rao's only collection of short stories, *The Cow of the Barricades* (written between 1933-1937), are three stories dealing with the Independence struggle in India. "Narsiga" is the tale of an orphan who finds in Gandhi, and ultimately Mother India, symbolic figures to fill his own needs for affection.

The story "The Cow of the Barricades" gives a picture of India's struggle for independence under the inspiring leadership of M.K. Gandhi. In the story, the Master is not other than the Mahatma. Gauri death symbolizes the enduring source of energy that lies in purity, peace, goodness and unselfishness.

In Kanthapura, the story was told from the witness - narrator point of view by an old illiterate village grandmother, a minor character in the novel, who, like a chorus in tag reek tragedy, reflected on the circumstances which she witnessed. In this novel Raja Rao relates the story of a south Indian village - Kanthapura from which it derives its title - as it recalled to Mahatma Gandhi's call of non-co-operation.

It gives a graphics and moving description of the National movement in the twenties when thousands of villages all over India responded in much the same way. In fact, the initial reaction of Kanthapura to Gandhian thought is one of bored apathy. But young moorthy, the Gandhian, who knows that the master key to the Indian mind is religion, puts the new Gandhian wine into the age-old bottle of traditional story. The struggle is even harder for the simple. Illiterate village women who don't understand why and from where it all and know that the Mahatma Gandhi is right in his work. Iyengar sums Ivenenow sums up this novel in words, "A village, picturesque region, an epoch of social and political change, a whole complex of character and motive, reason and superstition, idealism and calculation, are spring up before owe eyes demanding recognizing and acceptance: It is almost a tour de force.

Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope (1960) is the greatest of Indian English novels. This novel, which took ten years in shaping itself, is a highly complex and many-sided novel.

Being at once the tragic story of a marriage of minds which drift apart : the spiritual autobiography of a learned, sensitive and imaginative modern Indian intellectual, as also a saga of this quest of self-knowledge and self fulfilment. The hero "Ramaswami, is a young man of great literary cultures.

He knows many languages, vastly read and widely travelled man. Being a product of many cultures, Rama's mind is a seething whirlpool of cultural currents and cross-currents.

Unlike the simple story teller in Kanthapura, who knew only Indian myths and legends, Rama is familiar with myths and legends of different civilizations and he can discern parallels between them and forge a link between the past and the present by comprehending the essential oneness of history. Raja Rao has used the myths and legends to highlight the situation of characters or the relationship between them and to substantiate or concretize the

abstract thought of the hero, Ramaswamy. The title "The serpent and the Rope" is symbolical and philosophical as it illustrates the doctrine that just as the rope is often wrongly taken to be the serpent, the limited self is often regarded the individual soul, which is only an aspect of God. One realises that the 'serpent' is really only a rope, when one who knows points this out similarly upon being initiated by the Guru; one realises that Jiva (soul) is one with Siva.

The Serpent and the Rope is truly philosophical novel in that in it the philosophy is not in the story - the philosophy is the story. Raja Rao's fiction obviously lacks the social dimension of its two major contemporaries. Not for him the burring humanitarian zeal of neither Anand, nor Narayan's sure grasp of the living description of the daily business of living. But only his two novels have given him the same fictional chord of their contemporaries.

## 14.2 SUMMARY

The celebrated novelist, Raja Rao was an Indian writer in English, whose novels and short stories are deeply rooted in Metaphysical Philosophy. His involvement in the national freedom movement is reflected in his works. The novel "**Kanthapura**" (1938) and a short story "**The Cow of the Barricades**" (1947) are an account of the impact of Gandhian teachings on nonviolent resistance against the British rule in India.

The short story "**The Cow of the Barricades**" gives us a picture of India's struggle for independence under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Master in this short story is none other than Mahatma Gandhi. The presence of the cow, Gauri, in this story and its death at the end of the story symbolizes the enduring source of energy that lies in purity, peace, goodness and unselfishness.

All people paid high respect to Gauri, the cow, who used to visit the Master on every Tuesday evening before the sunset and nibble at the hair of the Master. The Master touched and caressed her and said: How are you, Gauri? She simply bent her legs and drew her tongue and shaking her head and ambled round him and disappeared among the bushes. And till next Tuesday she was not be seen anywhere.

Gauri's arrival to the Master's Hermitage gave a kind of awareness among the people who were very eager to know about her. Being an animal, a cow was unable to say who she was.

She would often come to the Master who had prepared fodder for her including grass, rice-water and husk. Her eating style, the movement of her jaws was like as if she was uttering some words in favour of the people. People thought her to be a strange creature and the Master might have known her whereabouts. After being well received she had to leave the Hermitage without any further halt. The master thought her to be his baton-armed mother-in-law.

Everybody liked, loved and respected her to be a sacred creature. People thought her as Goddess Lakshmi, to support both the rich and the poor. All types of people come to her carrying various wishes to be graced and fulfilled by Gauri. The students for a better pass, girls for handsome husbands, widows for purity, childless for children etc. Therefore, every Tuesday there was a well-prepared procession of men and women at the Master's hermitage.

But, Gauri would pass by them all like a holy wife among men. Sometimes, Gauri would not accept food offered by others. People would give the food untouched to the fish in the river. Astonishingly, crocodiles were not seen anywhere at this time so that the fish in the river were able to fearlessly gorge on the food.

Thus, Gauri was compassionate and true to many people so they all worshipped her to be the Goddess Lakshmi. Meanwhile, there was a fierce fighting between the red men (British soldiers) and the people of India. The fighting was for Indian independence for which the red administration was in robust condition. The Master persuaded the workmen of the industrial townships and villagers to boycott the foreign goods and clothes. He even instigated the workmen to refuse the services of the red men government. As a result, a large number of workmen came forward to join the struggle for independence. They refused to work under the foreign rule. They refused to pay taxes to the Government. Everywhere it was preached that the children must wander in the streets holding either blue cards or red cards to indicate the mood of the red soldiers. People hoarded their valuable and left the village to stay in the farmlands. Women were refused to go out of their homes to the open streets of the village. They were forbidden to continue worshipping in the temples.

The workmen built barricades at different places and they remained behind the barricades. They thought that the red soldiers might not cross over the barricades and workmen would easily win them. The Master often came and requested people not to go astray, not to follow violence, but the workmen were so upset that they thought if they did not adopt the tit for tat way, they would not be the stonehearted red men.

A large number of soldiers were called for from different parts of the country and stationed at the strategic points of the village. The red man's Government thought to rule over India whatever be the cost.

While the whole town was tense and full of barricades, Gauri walked along, surrounded by people among whom some started worshipping her, and begged her peace and salvation.

Gauri was put on the barricades and the whole people became jubilant. The red soldiers got surprised looking at Gauri and thought to be the token of victory of Master. The chief of the red men fired a shot and Gauri died on the spot. But surprisingly nobody could see a drop of blood falling down from Gauri's head.

The Seth Jamnalal Dwarak Chand built a statue of Gauri at the spot and people started worshipping her. Children played on her body and the Master thought Gauri was waiting in the Middle of Heavens to be born again.

The cow of the barricades, a short story from Raja Rao takes place during India's struggle for independence from British rule. It highlights two major aspects of the conflict: the people's desire for self-government, and the division within the people between those who supported Gandhi's directive of passive resistance and those who advocated violent confrontation. The symbol of Gandhian resolution is a revered cow (a holy animal in Hindu culture) which, like many such advocates over the years, is martyred for the cause after leading a crowd of peaceful protesters to barricades as fighting is about to begin. Themes of the cow of the barricades are independence, faith and nonviolent resolution of conflict.

Raja Rao had a rare insight which helped him in representing the freedom struggle in an unbiased manner in his short stories. Despite not being fully convinced of Gandhian principles he cherished the dream of an independent India as he says that: "The Mahatma may be wrong about politics, but he is right about the fullness of love in all creatures the speechful and the mute." ( *The Cow of the Barricades*. Print. Page 91) The work of the Satyagrahis has been lauded in many manners like raising social and political awareness, the mindset of people has changed as they do not believe in orthodoxy and superstition. Caste system has lost its value in society, there is little untouchability and slowly but steadily injustices in society and race are being uprooted from their roots.

### 14.3 THE LITERARY ART OF RAJA RAO

"There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthala-purana, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village--Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright.

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move, we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana 48,000. The Puranas are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.

It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls, and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village."

"The whole oeuvre of Raja Rao is notable for seriousness of purpose, profundity of thought, a flair for vivid presentation of detail and a distinctive and vigorous English prose.

In fact, Raja Rao's own style is as yet the best example of this kind of distinctive expression in Indian fiction in English.

Rao is one of the most innovative novelists now writing. Departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He explores the metaphysical basis of writing itself, and of the world, through his works of fiction. His concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or people. Writing to him is sadhana, a form of spiritual growth. That is why he can say that he would go on writing even if he were alone in the world. In appropriating for fiction the domain of metaphysics, Raja Rao has enlarged the potential of the very genre."

"Raja Rao has received due acclaim for his innovative genetic contributions to Indian English writing, for being indeed a founding author of this branch of modern literature, and for pioneering a distinctive Indian subgenre of fiction usually referred to as the metaphysical

novel. This type of novel, anticipated and conceived in some of Rao's short stories, was of course presented to us in 1960 as *The Serpent and the Rope*. The experimental impulses in Rao's oeuvre are so rich, diverse, yet (let us be frank) at times obscure and esoteric as to defy ready definition and convenient classification. Still, even initial responses to Rao's work recognize his literary experimentation with language, idiom, symbolism, cross-cultural narratology, autobiography, philosophy, history, romance, Pilgrim's Progress archetypes, and representation of character and human relationships, to name some of the main and more obvious areas of his creativity."

Young Moorthy, back from the city with "new ideas," cuts across the ancient barriers of caste to unite the villagers in non-violent action--which is met with violence by landlords and police. The dramatic tale unfolds in a poetic, almost mythical style which conveys as never before the rich textures of Indian rural life. The narrator is an old woman, imbued with the legendary history of the region, who knows the past of all the characters and comments on their actions with sharp-eyed wisdom. Her narrative, and the way she tells it, evokes the spirit of India's traditional folk-epics.

"E.M. Forster considered *Kanthapura* to be the best novel ever written in English by an Indian. Not the least of its merits is the picture it gives of life in one of the innumerable villages that are the repositories of India's ancient but living culture. In vivid detail, Rao describes the daily activities, the religious observances and the social structure of the community, and he brings to life in his pages a dozen or more unforgettable individual villagers. The novel is political on a superficial level, in that it chronicles a revolt against an exploitative plantation manager and the police who support him. But more profoundly, it traces the origins of the activities of the Congress party. One of the young men of the village, while away, undergoes a mystical conversion to Satyagraha, and returns to incite his fellow villagers to civil disobedience. He arouses in them not only a sense of social wrong but, more importantly, a religious fervour which proves to be the true source of their strength against the oppressors."

*The Serpent and the Rope* (symbols of illusion and reality in Indian tradition) gives the full implication of the meeting of East and West on the most intimate plane by Rama, a young Indian, and his story moves through India, France, and England at the time of the Queen's Coronation.

Madeleine, his French wife, seeks a human answer to her problems, which she ultimately finds in a personal equation of Catholicism and Buddhism; for Rama a solution is not so easy, but eventually he realizes that he must take the final leap into reality, and search for a Teacher, his Guru.

"Semi-autobiographical, *The Serpent and the Rope* records the disintegration of a marriage, mainly on philosophical grounds, of a very scholarly Indian Brahmin and a French woman professor. The union flounders on the incompatibility of the Brahmin's Vedantic conviction that 'Reality is my Self' and the wife's Western belief--even though she has become a Buddhist--that the evidence of our senses is based on an objective reality outside ourselves. 'The world is either unreal or real--the serpent or the rope,' the Brahmin assures his wife. 'There is no in-between-the-two...' The intellectual demands that Raja Rao, roaming at large through world history and among the religions, philosophies, and literatures of Europe and Asia, makes upon his readers are unequalled in any modern novel since Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.



Wittily, with extraordinary common sense and gusto, Govindan Nair--an astute, down-to-earth philosopher and clerk--tackles the problems of routine living. His refreshing and unorthodox conclusions continually panic Ramakrishna Pai, Nair's friend, neighbor, and narrator of the story. This is a gentle, almost teasing fable, plain-spoken and humorous. Descriptions of daily concerns are compassionate and evocative.

The raw texture of Indian life is woven into the tale of two friends whose own lives have the simplicity of joy and the unaffected universality of Shakespeare, who India has wisely made her own.

"The Cat and Shakespeare is much shorter and lighter in tone [than *The Serpent and the Rope*], though scarcely less metaphysical. The subject of its probing is the problem of individual destiny, and the solution is conveyed through an odd analogy offered by a government clerk: 'Learn the way of the kitten. Then you are saved. Allow the mother cat, sir, to carry you.' Raja Rao here exploits the Vedantic idea of the world being a play--*lila*--of the Absolute, and the result is a hilarious comedy that does not even spare Shakespeare and his language."

The Chess master and His Moves functions, all at once, at several different levels. At one level it is the story of an impossible love between Sivarama Sastri, an Indian mathematician working in Paris and a married woman which can only end in sorrow and despair. To come to terms with its impossibility, the protagonists turn inward in their search for answer and meaning, transforming the book into a metaphysical exploration. Amidst this search, each and every act, big or seemingly small, gets imbued with special meaning.

Sastri's love for the French actress, Suzanne Chantereux, or her beguiling, effervescent compatriot Mireille, for instance, serve to underline the differences between the East and West; while the latter seek happiness in the world, Sastri is looking for freedom from the world itself.

The Chessmaster is rich: in language, plot, in complexity, too, it is rich. And rich in locale and in its large cast of memorable characters Indian, European, African, and Jewish.

By turns tender, tragic, sensuous or filled with laughter and delight the book nevertheless remains utterly serious, concerned with the author's abstract search for the Absolute. Grand in sweep and range, the story moves from France to London, and on to the Himalayas and Bengal and contains, perhaps for the first time ever in a literary work, a dialogue between a Brahmin and a Rabbi: an exploration of reasons for the Holocaust and an attempt to expiate it. (publisher's note)

"The Chessmaster and His Moves is firmly rooted in the Indian metaphysical tradition that it seeks to illuminate in the form of an epic novel encompassing three countries India, England and France besides the fourth one, of the human mind. Structured as a *bhashya* on the esoteric knowledge of India often expressed in the terse, aphoristic style characteristic of such commentaries, totally indigenous in the narrative pattern that collapses a number of stories as in Bana's *Kadambari* or the *Vikramaditya Tales*, *The Chessmaster and His Moves* reveals the great Upanishadic truth of *tat twam asi* from the metaphysical position of Advaita Vedanta. The characters here seem to comprise a scale of spiritual awareness in terms of deliverance." Raja Rao has long been recognised as "a major novelist of our age."

**His five earlier novels**

*Kanthapura* (1932),  
*The Serpent and the Rope* (1960),  
*The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965),  
*Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and  
*The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) and three collections of short stories,

*The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947),  
*The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) and

*On the Ganga Ghat* (1989) won wide and exceptional international acclaim. Raja Rao was awarded the 1988 Neustadt International Prize for Literature which is given every two years to outstanding world writers. Earlier, *The Serpent and the Rope* won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, India's highest literary honour. More recently, Raja Rao was elected a Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi. Born in Mysore in 1909, Raja Rao went to Europe at the age of nineteen, researching in literature at the University of Montpellier and at the Sorbonne. He wrote and published his first stories in French and English. After living in France for a number of years, Raja Rao moved to the US where he taught at the University of Austin, Texas.

**Notable work** are *Kanthapura* (1938) *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960).

**Notable awards are:**

Sahitya Akademi Award (1964).  
Padma Bhushan (1969),  
Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1988), and  
Padma Vibhushan (2007).

**14.4 TECHNICAL/ KEY WORDS**

**Barricades:** an obstruction or rampart thrown up across a way or passage to check the advance of the enemy.

**Conflict:** A serious disagreement

**Independence:** The fact or state of being independent.

**Struggle:** Make forceful or violent efforts to get free of restraint or constriction.

**Control:** Not showing emotion having one's feelings under control.

**Sacrifice:** Give up for the sake of other considerations.

**Peace:** Freedom from disturbance; tranquility.

**Freedom:** The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants.

**14.5 SELF- ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. What is the central idea contained in the cow of the barricades?
2. Whose impact does the story *Cow of Barricades* portray?
3. What was the name of the cow in the cow of the barricades? Explain.
4. Who is Gauri in the cow of the barricades?

5. What is the message of the cow in the short story?
6. What is the contribution of Raja Rao to the literature?
7. Write an essay on freedom struggle in the short story “The cow of the barricades”?

#### **14.6 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. U.R. Anantha Murthy's essay, "Raja Rao" in *Word as Mantra*, Robert L. Hardgrave, ed., Delhi, Katha, 1998.
2. Rao Raja. *Collected Stories*. Penguin Books India, 2014.
3. M. K. Naik *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories: Raja Rao as a Short Story Writer, Books Abroad*.
4. Rao, Raja. *The cow of the barricade and other stories*. [Madras]: Indian Branch Geoffrey Cumberlege Oxford University Press, [1947].
5. Agarwal. R. C. *Constitutional development and National Movement of India*. S. Chand, New Delhi, 1988.

**Dr. K. Narasimha Rao**

## LESSON 15

# DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR - NATION AND DEMOCRACY

(Speech on “the Adoption of the Constitution of India delivered to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949)

### OBJECTIVES

This lesson aims to

- introduce you to Ambedkar’s life and writings.
- discuss his speech on the adoption of Indian Constitution.
- focus on questions like, what is ‘nation’, and ‘democracy’ in Ambedkar’s conception.
- to understand the significance of Ambedkar’s speech.

### STRUCTURE

15.1 Introduction

15.2 Dr.B.R. Ambedkar’s Life

15.3 Dr. Ambedkar’s Writings

15.4 Analysis of the text and Critical Comments

15.5 Summary

15.6 Sample Questions

15.7 Suggested Reading

### 15.1 INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we will examine Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s highly regarded and widely quoted concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949. We have extracted this speech from the Constituent Assembly debates and titled it ‘Nation and Democracy’<sup>1</sup>. One of the central concerns of Ambedkar in this speech is how to make India a nation and a democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar emerged as a scholar and a leader during the 1920s. His struggles for the Untouchables, his participation as a representative of the Untouchables in the Round Table conferences at London in the 1930s, his debates with Gandhi and his role in the drafting of the Indian constitution in the 1940s made him an undisputed Dalit leader as well as a national leader. Ambedkar articulated a separate identity for Dalits to claim their share in the new nation. He rejected Gandhi’s naming of the untouchables as Harijans. Ambedkar argued that annihilation of caste is possible only by destroying Hinduism. He advocated that social revolution must precede political revolution. Unlike the Congress nationalist leaders, he held strategic negotiations with the Colonial government to ensure Dalit rights in the new nation to be born. He embraced Buddhism in 1956. He advised Dalits to convert into Buddhism, as it is an egalitarian social philosophy.

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## 15.2 DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR'S LIFE (1891-1956)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 at a place called Mhow in Central India. He is the fourteenth child of Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai. The Ambedkar family hailed originally from the Konkan region in Maharashtra and its ancestral village, Ambavade, is located in Ratnagiri district. Ambedkar came from the Mahar caste among the untouchable castes. His father and grandfather Maloji served in the military service with the British. The family belonged to the democratic and humanistic Bhakti tradition of the Kabir panth.

Ambedkar's family shifted to Dapoli in Ratnagiri district after the retirement of his father Ramji. Young Ambedkar was sent to a local Marathi school in Dapoli, when his father again shifted to Satara with a civilian job. His mother died when he was very young in 1889. Ambedkar started his school education in 1900 in the Government High school there.

His original name in the school records was Bhima Ramji Ambavadekar. Ambedkar adopted the surname of his teacher for himself as a token of his respect and affection. At school, Ambedkar became a victim of the segregation and humiliation like every untouchable boy. He got married at the age of fourteen even while at school, studying in the fifth standard. The Bride Ramabai was just nine years old.

Ambedkar's family shifted to Bombay in 1904. Ambedkar studied at the Elphinstone High school. He passed his matriculation in 1907, a great achievement for a Mahar boy.

Ambedkar was presented with a copy of a biography of Buddha by the author, K.A. Keluskar.

Ambedkar continued his college education at Elphinstone College with the help of a monthly scholarship of twenty-five rupees offered by the Maharaja of Baroda. He passed his B.A. in 1913 with English and Persian as his subjects. In the same year Ambedkar lost his father who sacrificed a lot for the son's education. Ambedkar joined the Armed forces of the Baroda state in the rank of Lieutenant for a brief period.

Ambedkar got an opportunity to go abroad for higher studies. He left for Columbia University in 1913. From Columbia in the USA, he went to another renowned centre of education, the London School of Economics in UK in 1916.

Ambedkar came back to India in 1917 and joined as Military secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda. He was humiliated by the caste Hindus in his office and in the city. He moved to Bombay. He did some small jobs and worked as a temporary professor of Political economy at Sydenham College in Bombay for some time. He left for London in 1920 to complete his studies. Back home, he started his career as a lawyer in the Bombay High Court in 1923.

Ambedkar lost three of his sons and a daughter when they died in infancy. He bravely faced this loss. His only son Yashwant was born in 1928. His wife had to suffer from illness when Ambedkar was away for his studies. Ramabai passed away in 1935. Ambedkar remarried Dr. Sharda Kabir, a saraswat Brahmin, late in his life in 1948.

Ambedkar emerged as one of the leaders of the nation and the champion of the Untouchables in the 1930s and 1940s. He was active in political life till his death in 1956.

He worked as Professor of Law, Principal, Member of Bombay Legislative Council and later as Labour Member in the Viceroy's Council and as a Member of the Constituent Assembly. He was appointed as Law Minister in the Independent India and as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian constitution.

### 15.3 AMBEDKAR'S WRITINGS

Ambedkar's writings and speeches, 17 volumes of which have been already brought out, speak of his vast erudition and learning. He emerges from these writings as a constructive social philosopher with originality of thought.

He read out **Castes in India**, his first major scientific investigation into the structure and nature of Hindu society, before the Anthropology seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenwizer at the Columbia University, New York, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1916 when he was just 25 years old. He articulated his thoughts on the problem of linguistic restructuring of Indian politico-administrative system in his **Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province**. His **States and Minorities** reveals his most authentic constitutional, political and social commitments. He demonstrates his great familiarity with Indian literatures in his **Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India** and his **Riddles in Hinduism**. Ambedkar embarks on a polemical attack on caste as the single most disastrous feature of Hindu society and the single most important cause of its downfall through history in his celebrated **Annihilation of Caste**, which was originally written as a presidential address to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1935. We have referred to some of the key texts of Ambedkar from his voluminous work.

It is a tragedy that Ambedkar is not considered an important Indian writer in Indian English literary history. He was excluded from the canon of Indian English Literature and also from the disciplines of History, Sociology, and Political Science. In recent times, the rise and spread of Dalit movement in India has brought Ambedkar to the centre stage of Indian politics and Academics.

Let me offer you a brief comment on Ambedkar's prose style before we start our analysis of 'Democracy'. Ambedkar's prose style has two important dimensions scholarly and polemical. In the first mode, his prose is classically structured, rooted in principles of balance, symmetry and harmony; his style is close to that of the well-known political philosopher Burke. His second mode, which he employed in his polemical writings, is figurative with frequent use of irony, understatement and overstatement. He combined scholarship and passion in his polemical writings. We have yet to study Ambedkar as one of the masters of Indian English political prose.

### 15.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

The speech begins with Ambedkar making a few preliminary remarks regarding the drafting of the Constitution and the time taken for drafting by the Committee. He defends the draft and the Committee on certain points which have given rise to criticism. Ambedkar also convinces the members of the Joint Parliament regarding the complaints made against the constitution which has given high-power to the Centre over the States. Let us observe how he confronted these complaints in his own words:

A serious complaint is made on the ground that there is too much of centralization and that the States have been reduced to Municipalities. It is clear that this view is not only an exaggeration, but is also founded on a misunderstanding of what exactly the Constitution

contrives to do. As to the relation between the Centre and the States, it is necessary to bear in mind the fundamental principle on which it rests. The basic principle of Federalism is that the Legislative and Executive authority is partitioned between the Centre and the States not by law to be made by the Centre but by the Constitution itself. This is what Constitution does. The States under our Constitution are in no way dependent upon the Centre for their legislative or executive authority. The Centre and the States are co-equal in this matter. It is difficult to see how such a constitution can be called centralism. It may be that the Constitution assigns to the Centre too large a field for the operation of its legislative and executive authority than is to be found in any other federal Constitution. It may be that the residuary powers are given to the Centre and not to the States. But these features do not form the essence of federalism. The chief mark of federalism as I said lies in the partition of the legislative and executive authority between the Centre and the Units by the Constitution. This is the principle embodied in our Constitution.

The second charge is that the Centre has been given the power to override the States.

This charge must be admitted. But before condemning the Constitution for containing such overriding powers, certain considerations must be borne in mind. The first is that these overriding powers do not form the normal feature of the Constitution. Their use and operation are expressly confined to emergencies only. The second consideration is: Could we avoid giving overriding powers to the Centre when an emergency has arisen? Those who do not admit the justification for such overriding powers to the Centre even in an emergency, do not seem to have a clear idea of the problem which lies at the root of the matter.

There can be no doubt that in the opinion of the vast majority of the people, the residual loyalty of the citizen in an emergency must be to the Centre and not to the Constituent States. For it is only the Centre which can work for a common end and for the general interests of the country as a whole. Herein lies the justification for giving to the Centre certain overriding powers to be used in an emergency.

Dr.Ambedkar is known for his forthright views about Indian politics and culture. This speech shows Ambedkar as a visionary and a great democrat who anticipates many of the contemporary problems in 1949. Even after 50 years of Independence, we have not been able to resolve the contradictions in our society. We are a witness to violent struggles and caste and communal agitations today. Given this contemporary scenario, Ambedkar's message and caution to the Constituent Assembly and to the people is significant and relevant today. Let us see his apprehensions:

But my mind is so full of the future of our country that I feel I ought to take this occasion to give expression to some of my reflections thereon. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, India will be an independent country (Cheers). What would happen to her independence? Will she maintain her independence or will she lose it again? This is the first thought that comes to my mind. It is not that India was never an independent country. The point is that she once lost the independence she had. Will she lose it a second time? It is this thought which makes me most anxious for the future. What perturbs me greatly is the fact that not only India has once before lost her independence, but she lost it by the infidelity and treachery of some of her own people. In the invasion of Sind by Mahommed-Bin-Kasim, the military commanders of King Dahar accepted bribes from the agents of Mahommed.-Bin-Kasim and refused to fight on the side of their King. It was Jaichand who invited Mahommed Gohri to invade India and fight against Prithvi Raj and promised him the help of himself and the Solanki kings. When Shivaji was fighting for the liberation of Hindus, the other Maratha noblemen

and the Rajput Kings were fighting the battle on the side of Moghul Emperors. When the British were trying to destroy the Sikh Rulers, Gulab Singh, their principal commander sat silent and did not help to save the Sikh kingdom. In 1857, when a large part of India had declared a war of independence against the British, the Sikhs stood and watched the event as silent spectators.

Will history repeat itself? It is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost for ever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood.

We will discuss two central concerns of Ambedkar in the speech: the task of constructing a nation and building a democratic society. These two concerns are central to the making of the Constitution.

During the national movement, most of our nationalist leaders have argued that India was a nation. Gandhi has argued in his **Hind Swaraj** that the British divided India to rule over its people. He has believed that India was and is a nation. Ambedkar did not accept this view. He puts forth his view:

I am of the opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing the goal.

In this view, India is not a nation. We have to make India a nation. The Constitution is a document, which has the vision to make India a nation. We commit ourselves to the task of nation building by adopting the Constitution. The Constitution, for Ambedkar, is a document through which we designed 'ways and means of realizing the goal' – the making of India a nation. Ambedkar is a pragmatist who openly addresses the social divisions in India.

Ambedkar identifies the absence of equality and fraternity as the two crucial issues to be addressed to make India a nation. He argues that we lack "unity and solidarity in social life". Why do we lack "unity and solidarity in social life"? Ambedkar's answer is that the caste system is anti-national. As he puts it, In India there are castes. These castes are anti-national in the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste.

Ambedkar's concern is to make us aware that India is a land of social divisions. He knows that India is a nation in terms of its geographical unity and the political and administrative control of the Indians over this land. Ambedkar's point is that unless we bring unity in social life through annihilation of caste, we cannot call ourselves a nation. In other words, we have to make India a social democracy. It is significant that Ambedkar makes this argument at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of India. He anticipates that caste will be one of the hurdles to make India a nation. He reiterates the need to recognize "the evils that lie across our path."



Ambedkar's understanding of 'nation' is new and revolutionary. While the nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru have stressed the political unity of the nation, Ambedkar is critical of the nationalist understanding of 'nation'. Mere political unity without social and economic unity will only reproduce "separation in social life". We have failed to address the social crisis in India in the last 50 years. The consequence is that we have a nationwide Dalit Movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

The other issue that Ambedkar addresses in his speech is the establishment of democracy in India. Ambedkar is of the opinion that India has enjoyed the system of Democracy during the rise and spread of Buddhism in India even before the beginning of Christian era. But we lost this democratic system in the process of time. He cautions us that we are not ready to lose the democracy in India for second time. There must be strong roots for the smooth running of political democracy. He suggests some methods which we should follow without fail. Let us learn from his own words:

It is not that India did not know what is Democracy. There was a time when India was studded with republics, and even where there were monarchies, they were either elected or limited. They were never absolute. It is not that India did not know Parliaments or Parliamentary Procedure. A study of the Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas discloses that not only here were Parliaments – for the Sanghas were nothing but Parliaments – but the Sanghas knew and observed all the rules of Parliamentary Procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of Votes. Voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regulatization, *Res Judicata*, etc. Although these rules of Parliamentary Procedure were applied by Buddha to the meetings of the Sanghas, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the Political Assemblies functioning in the country in his time.

This democratic system India lost. Will she lose it a second time? I do not know. But it is quite possible in a country like India where democracy from its long disuse must be regarded as something quite new there is danger of democracy giving place to dictatorship. It is quite possible for this new born democracy to retain its form but give place to dictatorship in fact. If there is a landslide, the danger of the second possibility becoming actuality is much greater.

If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgment we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.

The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not "to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions". There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of liberty. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of

may other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

Democracy, according to Ambedkar, is of two types. One is political democracy and the other is social democracy. How does one preserve the constitutionally guaranteed political democracy? Ambedkar suggests that firstly, we have to abandon our violent / unconstitutional means to achieve our social and economic goals. We have to adopt constitutional methods to solve our grievances. Secondly, we have to give up 'hero-worship' "not to lay their (people's) liberties at the feet of even a great man". Ambedkar is of the firm view that hero-worship in politics leads to dictatorship.

Ambedkar further argues, "We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy". He defines social democracy as "a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life". He believes that we do not have equality and fraternity in India. We have already examined Ambedkar's views on the lack of fraternity in India in our discussion on the making of 'nation'. Let us examine Ambedkar's views on equality in the context of making India a democracy. We must refer to Ambedkar's often quoted passage:

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we shall have equality and in social and economic life we shall have inequality. In politics we shall be recognizing the principle of one-man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy at peril.

This advice, this warning, this caution to the Constituent Assembly and to the political class shows Ambedkar's foresight in anticipating the challenges to our political democracy.

He repeatedly draws our attention to the new reality of India being a nation and democracy on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950. Simultaneously, he suggests that we are entering into "a life of contradictions". The adoption of the Constitution makes India a nation and democracy. But we continue to have inequalities in our life in this new nation and democracy. Ambedkar emphasizes the need to recognize the contradictions in our life. He further suggests that we cannot separate the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

These principles, Ambedkar calls them "a union of trinity". If we separate this trinity, the very purpose of democracy is defeated. In Ambedkar's words, Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things.

To preserve independence and democratic institutions, Ambedkar proposes, we must recognize the social and economic inequalities in our life and that we must establish equality and fraternity in all spheres of life.

Ambedkar's conception of 'nation' and 'democracy' highlights 'the social crisis' in contemporary India. These two terms acquire a new connotation in Ambedkar's usage. In this speech, we see Ambedkar as a nationalist who believed in social and economic equality. His arguments are convincing and persuasive. His repeated rhetorical reference to '26 of January 1950' draws the attention of the readers to share the significance of independence and democracy and the anxiety of Ambedkar about the challenges before the country.

## 15.5 SUMMARY

In his concluding speech on the draft Constitution, Dr.Ambedkar draws the attention of the members of the Constituent Assembly about the challenges before the independent country-India. He emphasizes that we have to protect the unity and integrity of the country and also democratic values in our society. The adoption of the new constitution on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Ambedkar suggests, will make us an independent nation and a democratic country. Ambedkar reminds us that we were an independent nation in the past and we lost our independence once. We have won our independence now. Similarly, Ambedkar tells us that we were a democratic country in ancient times. He points out that our Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas were parliaments and that they observed all the rules of Parliamentary procedures such as Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of votes, voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regularization, etc. We lost our democratic system. Ambedkar cautions us that there is a danger of losing our independence and democracy for a second time. In this context, Ambedkar offers his 'reflections' on the steps to take to make India an independent nation and a democratic country.

To uphold democracy in India, Ambedkar observes, we have to (i) adopt constitutional methods to achieve our social and economic goals, (ii) give up hero-worship of 'our great men' (read politicians) and (iii) make our political democracy (one vote-one value) a social democracy. What is social democracy? Social democracy, Ambedkar explains, is a way of life that is based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar believes that there is no equality and fraternity in this country. We have political equality guaranteed by the constitution but we do not have economic and social equality. This is the situation that Ambedkar describes as "a life of contradictions". He warns us that this contradiction must be removed at the earliest or else those who are subjected to inequality will destroy the democratic structure that the constitution constructed.

Ambedkar points out that we do not recognize the principle of fraternity in our life. As a result, we do not have 'a sense of common brotherhood – of Indians being one people'.

One of the reasons for lack of fraternity, Ambedkar explains, is the division of people into several castes. To make India a nation and a democracy in the real sense, Ambedkar suggests, we have to establish equality in all spheres of life.

Independence, according to Ambedkar, has bestowed on us great responsibilities such as providing a Government for the people but not just a Government of the people and by the people. His speech is addressed to the Members of the Constituent Assembly as well as to the people of India. He persuades us that there is an urgent need to make India a nation and a democracy by removing all the hurdles like the caste system. He anticipates the danger that the downtrodden classes may be attracted to class war if a few people monopolize the political power.

## 15.6 SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. According to Ambedkar, “ we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word”. Do you agree with this view? Substantiate your answer with reference to the text.
2. What is Ambedkar’s understanding of social democracy?
3. “On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950,we are going to enter into a life of contradictions”. Comment.
4. Why did Ambedkar describe castes as anti-national?

## 15.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Rodrigues, Valerian (ed), **The Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.
2. Moon, Vasant (ed), **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: writings and speeches**, vol 1-17, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, Department of Education, 1979 – 2003.
3. Teltumbde, Anand, ‘**Ambedkar’ in and for the post- Ambedkar Dalit Movement**, Sugawa Prakashan, Pune 1997.
4. Ahir, D.C., **Dr. Ambedkar and the Indian Constitution**, Lacknow, Buddha Vihara, 1973.

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**MODEL QUESTION PAPER**  
**M.A. DEGREE EXAMINATION**  
**Third Semester**  
**English**

**Paper III — Indian Writing in English**

**Time : Three hours**

**Maximum : 70 marks**

**Answer ONE question from each Unit.**

**All questions carry equal marks.**

1. (a) Write a short note on any THREE of the following.

- (i) Themes of early Indian English poetry
- (ii) Chief contributors of Romantic poetry and the marked style of their poetry.
- (iii) Factors led to the rules of Indian English Novel.
- (iv) Reflection of Metaphysics in Indian English
- (v) Literature of Indian Freedom Movement.
- (vi) Striking difference between pre-independence poetry and Post Independence Poetry.

Or

(b) Make an overview of pre-independence Indian English Literature.

2. (a) Make the critical estimate of Sarojini Naidu's "The Temple".

Or

(b) 'Versatility' is the outstanding characteristics of nissim Ezekiel's poetry. Examine this aspect of him with reference to the poems prescribed for your study.

Or

(c) How did A.K.Ramanujan describe the manifestation of a river in Madurai by earlier poets?

3. (a) How did Ravindra Nath Tagor Portray the self of Chitrangada in his play Chitra?

Or

(b) Hayavadana is a comedy ending in tragedy. Elaborate.

4. (a) Bring out the control theme of the novel untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand.

Or

(b) Discuss the message R.K.Narayan tried to convey through the portrayal of Nataraj in his The Man – eater of Malgudi.

Or

(c) Bring out the elements of “isolation” and ‘loneliness” embedded in Fire on the Mountain by Anita Desai.

5. (a) How did Raja incorporate India`s struggle for independence in his story “Cow of the Barricades”?

Or

(b) Bring out Ambedkar`s views on Indian Democracy that are reflected in his essay prescribed for you.