



Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota

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Indian Writings in English & Translation

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Block-Introduction

This paper is designed to introduce you, dear student, to Indian literature primarily written in English, including translated classics originally written in different Indian languages. Within the limited space of a single paper, attempt has been made to make the reading as varied as possible. With seven major poets, five major novelists, and two dramatists, the spectrum is fairly representative of the types of literature Indian writers have produced in English. Among those included in English translation are Kali Das, Shudrak, Prem Chand, Anant Moorty, Indira Goswami, and Maha Shweta Devi, representing major Indian languages.

As can be seen from the titles, writers with strong social concerns expressing in the style of critical realism alone have been selected for reading. Those appreciated for qualities other than those of moral values and ethical vision, praised for sheer brilliance of technical virtuosity, have been scrupulously avoided.

In our age of technology, valuelessness is a priority, and technical virtuosity a virtue to be prized. Literary sensibility has always been set against this decadent tendency of going technical, bidding adieu to moral values mankind has always strived to live by. As students of literature we have to remain on guard against such a tendency, which, unfortunately, is being promoted by the fashionable THEORY in literary criticism, and by crass commercialism in life.

The choice of texts made here lays special emphasis on the social relevance of literature, its capacity to raise our moral consciousness, making us sensitive to the issues that we encounter in everyday life. No doubt, art in any form – painting, poetry, drama, or fiction – is meant primarily for pleasure. However, the very pleasure it imparts takes us away from the common temptations of life, from our commercial greeds and common jealousies. Literary texts train us to objectively contemplate life, to see life steadily and see it as a whole.

Although for examination purposes, need not need to know all the texts prescribed in the paper, it is for our good that we attempt to acquaint ourselves with all of them. For wider the scale of our reading in literary texts, the deeper will be our knowledge of life and literature. The more one contemplates the creations of art, the more mature one becomes in the process of thought. The works of great writers chosen for familiarizing you with the stream of Indian literature in English, including important texts translated into English from other languages, are known for offering life in all its various forms comprising joys and sorrows, triumphs and trials, that lie in store for all of us, enabling us to cope with different situations in life, offering insights into difficult moments of moral choice and social commitment. Decidedly, you will feel enriched after reading these texts, acquiring a stronger moral sense and greater sense of detachment.

UNIT-1

RABINDRANATH TAGORE : *GITANJALI*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Life and Works of Rabindranath Tagore
- 1.2 Tagore's Concepts of Arts and Poetry
- 1.3 Tagore: A Poet of Western Romantic and Eastern Mystical Tradition
- 1.5 Theme of *Gitanjali*
- 1.6 *Gitanjali* as a Metaphysical Poem
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Review Questions
- 1.9 Bibliography

1.0 Objectives

To study Rabindranath Tagore is to know the essence of Indian artistic traditions, to understand a great man who became a cultural hero and international figure. Tagore was an unofficial ambassador to the world and put India on the literary map of the world.

To appreciate him fully, it is essential to note the quality and beauty of his mastery of English language that made him a renowned writer. He belonged to the whole world being "a darling of versatility." He is a poet who first gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene.

1.1 Life and Works of Rabindranath Tagore(1861-- 1941)

Tagore was a many-sided genius and a source of inspiration to millions of modern India. He was a prolific writer and a pioneer in many fields. He was a poet, dramatist, actor and producer; he was a musician and a painter; he was an educationist, a practical idealist who turned his dreams into reality at Shantiniketan; he was a social reformer, philosopher, prophet of a new age and a planner of rural reconstruction; he was a nationalist, education theorist and experimenter; he was a novelist and short story writer and a critic of literature; he even made occasional incursions into national politics but remained essentially an internationalist; he was an integral whole, the Rishi, the Gurudev as Gandhiji called him. His fecundity and vitality were amazing.

Tagore's active literary career was spread over a period of sixty five years. Probably

he wrote the largest number of lyrics and songs which continue to be sung to this day wherever Bengali is spoken. He wrote and travelled and lectured untiringly.

If to the West he is known as a great writer of *Gitanjali*, to us he remains to be a source of inspiration and an outstanding name in modern Indian literature in English as he was the one who first gained for modern Indian a place on the world literary scenario.

Rabindranath Tagore, the youngest of seven sons of Maharshi Debendranath was born on 6th May, 1861 in the ancestral mansion, Jorasanko in central Calcutta. He was surrounded by affluence and aristocratic culture and hardly could spend any time with his mother who was busy looking after a huge and sprawling family. Under his father's instruction the children led a rather Spartan life. In the due course he was sent to a school but the formal education did not suit him and in the end he became a drop out. He enjoyed the literary inheritance of Madhusudan, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Bankim Chandra who were his forerunners. In such creative atmosphere he could breathe an air of hope and infinite possibility. As a child he was drawn to Bengali Vaishnava singers and indeed to Indian devotional poetry in general. At the age of fifteen or earlier he began writing, and by 1875 his first efforts in prose and poetry began to appear in print. He had written about 7,000 lines of verse before he was eighteen. During his visit to England, he was deeply influenced by the Romantic poets – Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth – and the great Victorians, Tennyson and Browning. He also admired Shakespeare.

On December 9, 1883, Tagore was married to Mrinalini Devi Raichaudhari, the daughter of one of the junior officers of the family estate. Within six months of the marriage his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi committed suicide. The mystery of this event has never been solved. He had two sons and three daughters. For some times Tagore worked as a secretary of Brahma Samaj which was “a quasi-theological’ exercise for him. The zamindari work could not be neglected; Surprisingly, Rabindranath was an effective landlord besides being the lord of poetry also.

In 1883 he started writing plays and at the same time he identified himself with the national movement but he was too individualist to follow any orthodox path. Often he retired to Shantiniketan, which owed its origins to Tagore's father, the Maharshi, for literary creativity, education and meditation. Later on the place became the focal centre of a new experiment in living where the culture of the East and the West bridged the dichotomy. He recommended that the “deep association” and cooperation rather than segregation is the answer the existing serious problems. In 1890 Tagore moved to East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and it was the most productive period of his life. In 1902 Tagore founded a school outside Calcutta, Visvabharti, which was dedicated to emerging Western and India philosophy and education. It became a University in 1921. Unfortunately Tagore's wife died in 1902, next year one of his daughters died and in 1907 he lost his younger son.

However, at fifty Tagore had already a surprising output to his credit – poems, novels, short stories, a history of India, text books and treatises on pedagogy. The masses had accepted

him as a bard, a national poet as the commemoration meeting held in Calcutta on 28th Jan. 1912 proved. At this juncture Tagore started translating his own lyrics into English. His translation soon captured the attention of various scholars in England and all this facilitated the publication of *Gitanjali* in 1912 with W.B. Yeats' memorable Introduction. The news did not come altogether as a surprise. He is reported to have said: "I shall never have peace again. . . . The bird in the nest has found his sky."

In Nov. 1913, Tagore returned to India to Shantiniketan and heard the news of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to him. In Shantiniketan and Sriniketan harmony was the keynote of all the activities. If the cultural front was to be related to the life of the community, the educational activities included the vocational training. These institutions later grew to be the Vishvabharti University where the International team of dedicated scholars attempted to create an environment totally congenial to enact the drama of human unity and humane understanding. He did not involve himself intimately with the political currents in India. Whenever the political climate bothered him, he returned to this place for the cultivation of the inner spiritual solace.

The phenomenal success of *Gitanjali* encouraged him to bring out more volumes of English translation and even some original writing in English, for example, *Poems, The Crescent Moon, The Gardener, Fruit-Gathering, Lover's Gift, Crossing, The Fugitive and Other Poems etc.* and many plays. He left behind an immense mass of prose writing in Bengali as well as in English. There are the novels and short stories, lectures and essays on a variety of subjects.

Between 1916 and 1934, Tagore travelled widely. In 1919, following the Amritsar massacre of 400 Indian demonstrators by the British troops, Tagore renounced his Knighthood conferred on him in 1915 by the British King George V. He visited England again in 1920. It was an ill-timed visit because of his rejection of then Knighthood. He went over to Paris where he met Bergson and others. He lectured in Netherland but when he reached America there was studied indifference every where. Things improved when, on the way back, he visited Switzerland. He had a splendid welcome in Germany where his sixtieth birthday was celebrated with fanfare. In Copenhagen, he was greeted with a torchlight procession. Though he enjoyed extensive travelling and meeting people but his mind was on other things as well. He was deeply concerned with the increasing dehumanization of life in an industrial society based on a manipulation of resources, human and non-human. Tagore was on the side of Life and Nature.

Meanwhile an invitation to China was accepted. This helped Tagore to open up the closed cultural contacts between the two countries. Soon after he had to visit Peru to participate in its Independence Day celebrations but due to sudden illness he could not participate in the function. In May 1925 Mahatama Gandhi came to Shantiniketan and then two Italian scholars visited bearing the gifts from Signor Mussolini. Tagore became delighted that his institution was becoming International and he acknowledged the gifts. He was busy delivering lectures and visiting places like Dacca, Italy, England, Norway and Germany. When he returned to India in December 1926, the communal riots loomed large. Tagore had often toyed with the

idea of renewing India's lost cultural contact with the Far East so he visited Singapore, Malaya, Java, Borneo, Sumatra and Indonesia. An invitation by the National Council of Education took him to Canada, where he spoke on "The Philosophy of Leisure." Due to health problem his lecture at Oxford was postponed but he had taken up a new hobby that is painting. He participated in an exhibition in Paris and then in Berlin. The Russian Government had invited him along with a group of people and was much impressed by the progress of education and cooperatives.

After a short visit to America, where his paintings were exhibited in New York, he came back to India. His seventieth birthday was held throughout the country despite the fact that the national scene looked bleak as the Second Round Table Conference had ended in smoke, Gandhi was arrested. Personal tragedy of his only grandson's death in Germany was a hard blow. Lecture tours and writing novels and poetry persisted despite the losses and shocks. In April 1940 Gandhi came to Shantiniketan and Tagore pleaded for the preservation of Visva-Bharti. On August 7, the Oxford University conferred on him the degree of D.Litt. at Shantiniketan itself. For the next few months he was bedridden still the writings continued because he kept faith till the end and stated "I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man." Only hours before he passed away on August 7, 1941 he dictated his last poem.

1.2 Tagore's Concept of Art and Poetry

Tagore wrote over one thousand poems, eight volumes of short stories, almost two dozen plays and playlets, eight novels, and many books and essays on philosophy, religion, education and social topics. Besides, he loved Bengali music immensely. He composed more than two thousand songs and lyrics. Two of them became the national anthems of India and Bangladesh. In 1920 he even began painting. Many of his paintings can be seen in the museums today, especially in India where he is considered the greatest figure of all times. It is enough to prove that Tagore was a renaissance man who is known throughout the world as the poet of *Gitanjali*. Its English translation done by Tagore himself with an Introduction by W.B. Yeats was brought out in 1912. It is the English translation of *Gitanjali* that won him the prestigious Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. Precisely speaking it is a collection of songs Tagore composed between 1907 and 1910. The English translation is not literal and comprehensive. Besides many poems of original Bengali *Gitanjali*, it has several lyrics from *Naivedya Kheya* and *Gitmalya*.

On casual reading *Gitanjali* appears to lack organic unity and the songs tend to be independent poems. However, in the songs there is a sustained emotional, thematic unity like the sonnets of Shakespeare and that lends a note of integrity to the text. Tagore combined the traditional poetic culture with western ideas. So much so that he earned the epitaph of "The Bengali Shelley." Like the Romantics he wrote in the common language of the people - something could not be easily accepted among the Indian critics and scholars.

Tagore expounded his views on art and poetry in his lectures on philosophy and art

published under the titles *Sadhna*, *The Religion of an Artist*, *Lectures and Addresses*, *The Religion of Man*, *Personality*, *Creative Unity* and *Nationalism*. He attributed high concept of aims and functions of art and poetry and in this respect he stands with the great poets and critics like Longinus, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Mathew Arnold. Besides, the *Upanishads* and the Sanskrit poetics influenced him greatly and he cherished a belief that art should aim at realizing a relation between the world and the soul. He said that “art is the response of man’s creative soul to the call of the Real.” The realization of harmony, of feeling of oneness with the eternal is accomplished through personality and man’s personality finds powerful expression in art and poetry. Hence the content it expresses is emotionally tinged and it enriches human life by sublimating or illuminating feeling. In this sense poetry leads us to higher and healthier ways than those of the world, and interprets to us the moods of nature and the mystery of God. Tagore rejects the concept of art for art’s sake and believes that the aim of art is to bring to light the ultimate reality. He repeatedly asserts that harmony which is the soul of poetry deals with truth by establishing an emotional relationship with it. In other words, Tagore emphasized that poetry reveals the poetic truth which is not the mass of material like the truth of science but lies in the universal relatedness. Man has “a fund of emotional energy” and poetry ennoble him and emancipates his soul from materialism which militates against beauty and goodness and creates harmony between man and ultimate reality.

In “The Religion of an Artist” Tagore remarks:

“Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of the immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in varied forms of self realization.”

Thus the poet or the artist reveals himself and not his objects, and the reality consists not in facts but in the harmony of facts which tends to be the source of joy.

Tagore believed that poetry, like other fine arts, is communication. The experience which lived in the mind of the author must live again in the mind of the reader. The whole experience must be given, transplanted from one mind to another. In this sense, the poet expresses his personality which is the sum of his integrated emotions and ideas. This further means that in poetry “thought and art” are one.

According to Tagore, imagination plays a cardinal role in exhibiting truly the Reality by combining the sensuous and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite, the particular and the universal in the poet’s consciousness. In a way the poet realizes through his art “his own extension.” His views on poetry are conspicuously marked with sublimity and deep human concerns as the poet has to reveal to man the ultimate truths about life and the world, and has to emancipate him from dogma and from reasoning so that he can see the beauty of human heart.

Tagore points out in his book, *Personality* that “enjoyment is the essence of literature.” Therefore “A poet is a true poet when he can make his personal idea joyful to all men.” It is the “picture” or the visual imagery and “music” which the poet uses through language to add joy to

experience. In his concept of joy he seems to have been influenced by the *Upanishadas* and aimed to achieve something beyond joy through poetry.

Tagore was deeply immersed with the idea of art as form which includes proportion, rhythm, and unity of various elements. He says: “The rhythm of Beauty is the inner spirit, whose outer body is social organization.” Defining rhythm Tagore writes in “The Religion of an Artist”:

What is rhythm? It is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restriction. This is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in uncadenced prose form they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm they vibrate into a radiance. It is the same with a rose... The rose appears to me to be still, but because of its meter of composition it has a lyric of movement within that stillness which is the same as the dynamic quality of a picture that has perfect harmony.

Without rhythm and unity art would be meaningless even if it achieves harmony of parts. Rhythm reveals in art the universal quality, the *mantric* power which conveys the emotional atmosphere, without which experience can not live. About meter Tagore remarked Meter alone does not make poetry. The essence of poetry lies in delight it gives. Meter is an aid to it and introduces us to the knowledge of it

It is a firm faith of Tagore that like all arts poetry is related with life and world. It reveals great thoughts, universal truths and communicates the message of the Divine. Its aim is to impart “knowledge through emotions” which are purged of the personal bias. They become the glorious heritage of mankind as he affirms in *Personality*:

The artist finds out the unique, the individual, which is yet in the heart of the universal.

1.3 Tagore: A Poet of Western Romantic and Eastern Mystical Tradition

Tagore is in many ways influenced by the romantic tradition of the West. The most significant aspect of romanticism, particularly that of early nineteenth – century English literature, is a new and intense faith in the imagination. This is as true of Rabindranath Tagore as of Wordsworth and Coleridge, or Tennyson and Browning. The recorded fact that Rabindranath as a young man was especially fond of Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley and Browning lends weight to this literary assumption.

Although romanticism in Tagore is not purely a product of the impact of English poets, it is actually a combination of many diverse elements of the East and the West. Many particular as well as general elements of romanticism forge the link between Tagore and nineteenth century British romantic poets. Rabindranath and the romantic poets turned away from reason to imagination and intuition. Rabindranath’s romantic imagination does not dwell upon the mundane, banal actualities of existence, but as in Blake and Bridges, on the visions of the mysterious universe and the Creator. Rabindranath, in his passionate search for the divine life,

expresses the Devotee's intense experiences of pain, perplexity, and joy.

In portraying a harmonious and joyous relationship between Man and nature, in relying upon the authenticity of intuition rather than reason or sense-impression, in mystically visualizing the essential unity in the midst of diversity, and in the divine spirit that "rolls through all things" Wordsworth displays a greater affinity of spirit with Rabindranath than any other English poet. The oriental mystic thinks that the world is all *Maya* and illusion, and tries to pierce through this deceptive curtain and look beyond into the transcendental reality. Tagore's understanding of this reality, of our transcendental union with the eternal and divine being, apart from its specific Eastern element, bears a close resemblance to Wordsworth's perception of the divine.

Rabindranath, like Keats, was not content with merely expressing the accepted moral truths. His contemplative imagination discerned truth in beauty. Rabindranath in his lecture on "The Sense of Beauty" actually quotes Keats in expounding his own ideas regarding the relationship of Truth and Beauty.

Rabindranath, in *Gitanjali* and several other poems has sung of the relationship between our being and infinitude. In *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath writes: "He (God) is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking the stones. He is with them in sun and shower, and his garment is covered with dust. . . . Meet him and stand by him in toil and in the sweat of thy brow."

If in his mystical rendering of the transcendental unity, Rabindranath recalls the ideas poetically expressed by Wordsworth, in his passionate singing of and devotion to the idea of liberty he shows an affinity of spirit with Shelley and Byron.

Although Tagore does not clearly attempt to fit the doctrines of evolution and other scientific ideas into his transcendental scheme, as Walt Whitman does, he nevertheless comes close to Whitman in expressing his impatience with the stark and bare facts of science. Tagore reveals his sense of impatience with the dry details of astronomy by quoting Walt Whitman's well known poem "When I heard the learned astronomer." His comments on Whitman's poem clearly indicate his relationship with the spirit of the great American poet. Tagore writes: "The prosody of the stars can be explained in the classroom by diagrams, but the poetry of the stars is in the silent meeting of soul with soul. . . ."

The affinity of the spirit between Walt Whitman and Tagore strikes a much deeper note. Whitman is a singer and prophet of American democracy while Tagore is the singer of Indian Renaissance and of his country's political fate. For instance Tagore wrote a number of poems inspired by the threat of partition of Bengal in 1905-09.

It is pertinent to note that Romanticism in Rabindranath is observed in moving away from impersonal objectivity to an inwardly-felt individuality, from the old Sanskrit classical order to the new notion of intensity, from a self-conscious creative originality, from prosaic directness in expression to myth, image and symbol.

As a poet Tagore sets for himself a definite objective, that is, to sing about the tremendous mystical experiences of the sages. These experiences, which can have no rational claims, and can not be logically understood, have an irresistible appeal for him essentially because of the unique similarity between the sensibilities of the ancient sages and that of the poet who acknowledges that “in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry I want thee, only thee.” (XXXVIII, p17.) In *Gitanjali* he says:

“When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh, grant my prayer that I may never lose touch of the one in the play of the many.”

Much of Tagore’s ideology came from the teaching of the *Upnishads* and his own beliefs that god can be found through personal purity and service to others. He stressed the need for new world order based on transnational values and ideas, and the faith in “the unity of consciousness.” *Gitanjali* is a great document of intuitive faith and reads like the *Bhagwat-Gita* on the one hand and Psalms of the Old Testament on the other. It can be a synthesis of all that is best in the mystical experiences of the east and the west. As the biographical details confirm, the poet had heard the call of the “Ineffable Person” at a very young age and he took a vow to define the infinite possibilities of man and the innermost quest “to meet one day the life within.”, to unite with the “unbroken perfection.” *Gitanjali*’s first line is “Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.”

Tagore was a pure poet and not a theorist who would formulate a rigid system to describe the mystical experiences which have for him a great emotive value. Unlike many mystics, who believe in the possibility of merging into the Absolute, Tagore always maintains a safe distance between “Thou and me.” He holds, “the Separative consciousness” in XCVI song of *Gitanjali* where he had “caught sight of him that is /formless.” He listens to his “master” in utter amazement and calls Him “Life of my Life” in IV song and “my only friend, my best beloved” in song XXII. The series of songs in *Gitanjali* reverberate with such mystical experiences. Ultimately he says in song XXXIV: “I am /bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in / my life – and that is the fetter of thy love.”

To accrue that *Gitanjali* as a transcript of mystical experiences without their being conceived in imagination would be to deny that essential fact that he is a poet first: “I know thou takest pleasure in my singing....” Rather like a true poet he reaches the mystical consciousness through the transfigured senses of taste, sound, odour, touch and sight and celebrates that knowledge in his poetry. He openly declares: “I will never shut the door of my senses.” Because “The delights of sight and hearing and touch will beat thy delight.” (LXXIII) Once this experience is attained, even the outer world unfolds new meanings. The whole world becomes “the open letter of Lord.” These experiences can not be defined rationally or appreciated logically. Hence he uses the expositions “I know not,” “I feel.” For example take song LVII of *Gitanjali* where “sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth. The experiences through the senses gradually intensify the poet’s inner awakening. His expanded self includes life of all kinds outside self, of all emotional states, all conditions and situations and

excludes nothing. Hence, the cry: “my king, thus didst press the signet of eternity upon many a feeling/moments of my life.” (XLIII). As the new vistas of knowledge and understanding unveil themselves, the poet is filled with a sense of “intense certitude,” “peaceful joy” and “enhanced powers.” He perceives that the Universal life-spirit reflects in all the creation – near or far and “death dies in a burst of splendour, “as he says in XXXIV song of *Fruit-Gathering*. On such moments Tagore bows in his “silent salutation to thee” comprehending fully and distinctly that “From the words of the poet men take what meanings /please them; yet their lasting meaning points to thee.” (LXXV).

Thus, Romanticism in his work is related to his Vaishnava faith; he adheres to the doctrine of Bhakti; his intuitional awareness of the Divine, his mysticism, his idealism and his intense love of liberty. His poetry swings between two poles – a towering, rich, ennobling imagination and a deeply-felt, intense experience. The high, majestic quality of his imagination combined with his intense personal awareness and experience makes him a dreamer of dreams as well as a realistic champion of humanistic values. He is one of those great poets who not only visualized a kingdom of heaven above common humanity, but also transformed this kingdom of earth into a genuinely blissful place.

1.5 Theme of *Gitanjali*

Gitanjali is a blend of a number of themes and ideas. Its hundred and odd lyrics explore the relationship between God and Man, individual and humanity. It justifies the ways of man to God and vice versa. It “expresses in perfect language permanent human impulses”, and thus passes the test of great poetry as laid down by T. S. Eliot. Here poetry has become a revelation, and incantation, like Vedic mantras and the poem as a whole opens the closed petals our lotus heart. It is an X’ray of inner reality.

In the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, “The poems of Gitanjali are the offerings of the finite to the infinite.” Gitanjali is Tagore’s autobiography. But at the same time it is the voice of our own soul. Its central theme is the realization of God through self-purification, love, constant prayer, bhakti, dedication and surrender before God, through service to humanity and through ‘Karma Yoga’ and detachment from the worldly pleasures and desires without renouncing the world.

The central theme of Gitanjali despite the lack of a logical structural succession of a continuous theme is devotional : it expresses the yearning of the devotee for re-union with the divine. The poet is a singer and he seeks the realization of God through his songs. He considers himself to be a living musical instrument in the hands of God, the Master Musician. But he must remove his imperfections before he can be a fit instrument. The entire Sadhna of his life is elevated to removing the imperfections and the impurities of his mind and heart, to overcoming all obstacles in the path of his realization of God. A few of the song-offerings shall convince us about our claim :-

1. Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs.

2. In our salutation to thee, My God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet

In his love for God, Gurudev Tagore never ignored man. Tagore always sang to the glory of man. Man was the hero of all his songs. Not God alone, but man also is the main theme of Gitanjali. With mysticism is clubbed humanism, which is voiced forcefully in a number of lyrics. God is not to be found in the temple but with the lowliest of low. Idolatry and blind worship are castigated :

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whome dost thou worship in this lonely corner of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

The tiller, the stone-breaker, the honest labourer mocking in the spirit of the Gita are the real abode of God. The idea of escape from world's duties is condemned by the poet. Deliverance is to be found within and not in renouncing the world. Man can attain God by living in the world and performing his duties like a Karma Yogi.

Tagore's oft quoted and oft-recited prayer is the sum and substance of humanism. There could not be a greater humanistic strain than in the following lines :-

Where the mind is without fear and head is held high,

Where knowledge is free, etc.

According to Tagore, we can worship God only by loving and adoring the divinity in man. The most concrete and visible manifestations of the Supreme Being are men. We cannot comprehend the infinite nature of God. We can only sense Him through love and service to humanity. The true religion, therefore, ordains us to love humanity. Thus humanism is also the theme of Gitanjali.

Sometimes it is the union of man, God and Nature that becomes the major theme in the Gitanjali, may the whole of Tagore's poetic output is steeped in this colour. To quote the words of Romain Rolland, in the Gitanjali the poet ranges over the immensities of time and space, the eternal and the temporal and probes into the mysteries of life, of man and of nature and the poet's vision is "free, vast and serene."

Another major theme of Gitanjali is death, soul's voyage to eternity. This becomes prominent towards the end of the poet. The poet is not afraid of death; rather he welcomes it joyfully, for it is the gateway through which alone union with the eternal is possible. Death is not the end of life but a beginning of a new one; it is a renewal of life. In Gitanjali 74, life is spoken as a pitcher which is filled again through death. It is only through death that spiritual truths can be realized. Death is the bride and we all are bridegrooms and should be ready to meet her. (97 and 100).

Death to Tagore is an auspicious moment to provide him an opportunity to return to

the original home. It is a tryst with the dinner. It is an intimation of immortality. Whereas Donne and Hardy looked at it as something ghastly and fierce, Tagore speaks of death as a mystic. Death is his inseparable companion.

Thus in *Gitanjali* flowers from the gardens of light, time, death, beauty, Nature, Divinity, Humanism are culled. The beauty of the poem lies not so much in the statement of any kind of experience but in the realisation of experience through words which have in themselves become things.

To sum up, the theme is always Man : Nature : God : Life : Death - the universal things.

Themes of *Gitanjali*

1. A blend of themes and ideas. Justification of the ways of God to Man, relationship between God and Man.
2. Offerings of the finite to the Infinite.
3. Central theme is devotional - soul'd union with the Almighty.
4. Not alone God but also man is the theme of '*Gitanjali*'. With mysticism is clubbed humanism urging man to give up rituals and orthodoxy.
5. Sometimes it is death that is the central theme.
6. Towards the end it is death that is the central theme.
7. Thus is '*Gitanjali*' flowers from the garden of light, time, death, beauty, Nature, Divinity, Humanism are culled.

1.6 *Gitanjali* as a Metaphysical Poem

Gitanjali is a metaphysical poem, not in the sense of the 17th century metaphysical English poetry, but in the literal sense. It is metaphysical because it deals with the world beyond and hereafter. For the term 'metaphysical' too etymologically means beyond (meta) physical. *Gitanjali* indulges in philosophical speculation, mystical moorings and transcendental peace. It elaborately treats Death and God. It is metaphysical in its abstract character, emotional apprehension of thought which may be transmuted into the imagery of dreams, logical beauty, didactic mind, intensity, ethical content, divine love. It is metaphysical in as much as it falls within J. C. Grierson's definition of metaphysical poetry : Metaphysical poetry, 'in the full sense of the term is a poetry which like that of the '*Divine Commedia*', the '*De Natura Rerum*', perhaps Goethe's '*Faust*' has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence.' But *Gitanjali* is without the conventional far-Seventeenth century metaphysical verse of England. Broadly speaking, therefore, Tagore's *Gitanjali* can be called a mystical-cum-metaphysical poem. It is metaphysical because it is concerned with the meta world.

The poet is convinced of the continuity of life and he feels that man should be content

with what God has given him. Man touches the fringes of divinity in the created things. That should be sufficient to send him into raptures of joy. One of the things through which God manifests himself is his melody. He is a flute player sitting in a boat and he waits for man to join him. His music is like a holy stream that rushes on overcoming all obstacles. Even the stones are moved by it.

Man cannot get peace away from God. He must keep his body chaste and make his heart a citadel of God and his life a love-tryst with God. Life is like a flower which is offered to Him before it withers. There should be no delay in one's total surrender to Him. He is the bearer of our burdens and one should leave everything to His will. One need not approach Him with ornaments, ostentation or ritual. He also serves His humanity. The service to the poor and the needy is a service to God.

Deliverance can be found in true detachment and karma yoga, in doing one's duty without longing for the fruit of it. One need not renounce the world, what is needed is constant prayer and bhakti', pure heart and complete surrender before God. Man's happiness lives in singing God's glory.

There are many diverse ways to reach God. But the simplest and easiest is the one by love. Love is the highest virtue. It is above all codes and rules. The beloved feels forlorn and longs for Him. The soul of men will feel most desperate if she does not meet her bridegroom, God. She waits for Him like the night with its starry vigil. The fragrance of spiritual experience comes from within the soul.

The moment of spiritual illumination comes. One should watch for Him and wait for Him. He will come flooding our eyes with his light. He will come like a dream from darkness. He can be easily won over and not by scholarship or austerity. Beautiful is this world but more beautiful is detachment. It is not with rose petals that one attains the spiritual goal. It is with the sword of detachment, by cutting asunder all petty things of life, being solely devoted to Him, filled with all consuming love, one can reach Him. All Nature is His manifestation. Everything changes, but Death does not change. It comes and comes. Hence man should hasten to reach his Maker because man is a part of God. Soul should not bear separation from God.

Death is the last fulfilment of life. It is inevitable and man has to surrender himself before it in all his totality, when death strikes, all that man has ignored or spurned earlier will appear more valuable. So love well while you are alive. Yet one should be ready when the summons comes from God without any bitter feelings as life is one breast of the mother and death the other. The soul dispossessed of all the worldly goods will reach God in a sweeter manner.

All the above discussion is sufficient to prove the metaphysical and mystic nature of Gitanjali.

1. Gitanjali is not a metaphysical poem in the traditional sense of the 17th century metaphysical poetry of Donne and his school.

2. It is metaphysical in the literal sense, because it deals with what is beyond the physical.
3. Life is like a flower and therefore should be offered to God before it withers.
4. Deliverance can be found in detachment from worldly desires, not in the renunciation of world but by its acceptance through Karma Yoga.
5. All Nature is God's manifestation. Man is a part of God.
6. Death is the last fulfilment of life.

1.7 Let Us Sum Up

Through this unit you have had some ideas about Rabindranath Tagore's magnificent art of poetry and his beneficial message to mankind in all its sincerity. He believes that "all that is harsh and dissonant in life melts into one sweet harmony."

There is an urgent need that the Romantic and mystical traits in Tagore's poetry should be considered in relation to the modern age and its traditionalism and anti-traditionalism. It may essentially be interpreted as essentially a doctrine of experience since it champions the cause of validity and vitality of the individual's perception against the scientific speculation and abstraction generated by the contemporary western schools of thought. At the hands of poets like Tagore even romanticism and mysticism become the instruments to seek the human values. It is not an exaggeration to say that here Romanticism becomes a new name for the doctrine of experience in thought and feeling and of the modern humanist tradition.

Tagore firmly believed that the images and ideas should be first synthesized in the mind of the poet and then in the poem. According to him the faculties which create and transmit images are imagination, memory, dreams and vision as he says in *Chhbi O Gan* (Pictures and Songs.) When he writes poetry imagery spurts out automatically. Buddadeva Bose has rightly stated in his book, *An Acre of Greene Grass* that Tagore thinks in metaphors and argues in similes. They enlarge the meaning because of their symbolic truth. Tagore is interested in every object of nature like dew drops and flowers, sun light and moon light but the moving objects of nature like rivers and clouds fascinate him more as a result his poems are charged with kinesthetic images. In this sense he can be called a "pantheist" and his nature imagery is largely symbolic. He does not assign any fixed meaning to his metaphors, symbols, images and similes but he goes on pouring them in profusion and his songs "seemed to be lost in their depth."

Even when he uses homely images he manages to transcend them into spiritual symbols because he firmly believes in the mysterious principle of creation and the presence of the Divine power or God lives in the company of the poor and the downtrodden. Hence the desire to identify with the ordinary and the suffering humanity. There is an intense yearning for the complete union with God for which he tries several ways like the rigorous discipline and endurance. He says "If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it." Ultimately he realizes that God is the impelling force within man and lives in the "Horoscope of

ages.” In such realizations he recognizably echoes the *Gita*.

1.8 Review Questions

1. Write an essay on Rabindranath Tagore’s spiritual beliefs as presented in *Gitanjali*.
2. Discuss Tagore’s concepts of art and poetry.
3. “Tagore’s humanism is visible in his awareness of life’s sufferings and problems.” Do you agree?
4. Do you think that Tagore was deeply influenced by the English Romantic poets? Substantiate your answer.
5. Write a note Tagore’s Imagery.
6. What are the essential features of his poetry that create “essential music” in his poetry?
7. “Tagore was more a poet of Nature, than of man or God.” Analyse the statement.
8. “Tagore’s poetry is about a self –disclosure in the eternal journey of man.” Do you agree?
9. Write a note on the diction used in the poems of Tagore you have read.
10. Discuss briefly Tagore as a mystic poet. Illustrate your answer.

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UNIT-2

TORU DUTT : *OUR CASUARINA TREE*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Emergence of Indian Poetry in English
- 2.3 Toru Dutt : Life and Works
- 2.4 The Text of the Poem “*Our Casuarina Tree*”
- 2.5 Analysis of the Poem
 - 2.5.1 Critical Comments
 - 2.5.2 Glossary
- 2.6 Let Us Sum up
- 2.7 Review Questions
- 2.8 Bibliography

2.0 Objectives

This Unit deals with the emergence of Indian poetry in English in Calcutta (West Bengal) in the early decades of the nineteenth century during the colonial regime in India and discusses the contribution of many Indian poets and Toru Dutt in the growth of Indian poetry in English. Toru Dutt’s life and works have also been discussed here in brief. An analysis of one of her famous poems “*Our Casuarina Tree*” has also been made.

The objectives of this unit are to acquaint the students with

- i) the origin of Indian poetry in English.
- ii) the salient features of the poetry of early Indian English poets.
- iii) the contribution of Toru Dutt to the growth of Indian English poetry.
- iv) Toru Dutt’s life and works
- v) her poem “*Our Casuarina Tree*” and the interpretation of this poem.

By the end of this Unit, the students will come to know about the uniqueness of Toru Dutt as a poet, her love for Indian themes, scenes and images.

2.1 Introduction

Toru Dutt holds a prominent place in the early phase of the history of Indian poetry in English. Though she lived for a very short span and did not produce a prolific creative literature yet the quality of her creative endeavour is unmatched. Her maturity of thought and expression and blending of Western influences and Indian sensibility at a time when most of the Indian poets writing in English were imitating the western content and poetic idiom, lend her a unique place in setting new trends in writing poetry in English. This Unit will highlight these aspects of her poetic talent comparing her with her contemporary poets. Her choice of Indian themes, legends and images to communicate Indian values was something new. Her poem “Our Casuarina Tree” is a befitting example of her poetic art. We shall analyse this poem in this Unit.

2.2 Emergence of Indian Poetry in English

Indian writers have been writing poetry in English for more than one hundred and eighty years. In West Bengal, Calcutta was the place where the early Indian English poets belonged. In the later part of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, since Indians got exposed to the western education and English language and literature in Bengal especially, a craze for westernization developed. Among the educated ones, the study of English and French literature became a fashion and most of the westernized Indian youth got attracted towards Christianity. A few families living in Calcutta were influenced by the spirit of literary renaissance and new learning. Their interest in English language and literature inspired them to write poetry in English which was their great contribution to the treasure of Indian English poetry. Among these families, the families of Dutts and two Ghoses, Manmohan and Aurobindo, need a special mention for writing verse in English language. There were many Indian poets who wrote poetry in English, which was Indian in content and sensibility, and English only in form and language but almost all the early Indian English poets had taken the British Romantic poets as models. But, as M. K. Naik, observes, “they had failed to produce genuine romantic poetry, because in a sense they were not ‘romantic’ enough, i.e., they merely copied the eternal features of Romantic poetry, missing the core altogether. It was with Toru Dutt (1856-77) that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity.”

C. N. Srinath’s remarks about Toru Dutt are noteworthy : “Of all the Indian poets in English no other name has more magic about it than Toru Dutt’s. It is not merely the great promise that she held and the accomplishment she showed but the sad fact that she died at an untimely age of 21 which makes her the inheritor of unfulfilled renown.”

Now we shall discuss the life and works of Toru Dutt in brief.

2.3 Toru Dutt : Life and Works

Toru Dutt was born on March 4, 1856 in a respectable Hindu family of Calcutta. Her father Govind Chandar Dutt, the editor of the famous poetry collection *The Dutt Album*, was

a prominent linguist and also a cultured man with literary interests. Kshetramoni, her mother, had strong faith in Hindu religion and was well versed with Hindu myths. When Toru Dutt was six years old, her family got converted to Christianity and later they went to France and then to Cambridge (England) where she and her elder sister Aru attended the 'Higher Lectures for Women' and also made friends with Mary Martin, who became Toru's lifelong friend with whom Toru remained in contact through her letters, which are of great literary value.

The family was back home in India in November 1873 and here Toru engaged herself in translating the French lyrics by seventy different poets into English which were published in 1875 with the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. By this time she had lost her elder sister Aru and her brother Abju. She was sad with their memory and also missed England. When Toru was nineteen, she started learning the Sanskrit language and also read Hindu classical works like *The Mahabharata*, *The Ramayana*, *Shakuntala*, *The Vishnu Puran*, *The Bhagwat Puran* and wrote poems based on these books. Her next collection of poems *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* which came out in 1882 (after her death) with a foreword by Edmund Gosse reveals her deep interest and roots in Hindu tradition and thought and her imaginative amalgamation of the East and the West.

Her poetic sensibility was nourished by her French education, lectures she had attended at Cambridge and her study of Sanskrit literature. She has assimilated all these in her ballads. Infact, she is the first Indian poet who wrote about Indian myths and legends. She has written many nature poems also, which show her affinities mainly with two Romantic poets, John Keats and William Wordsworth. The noticeable feature of her verse is that it is free from imitation of British poets from whom she does quote but does not copy. Apart from the two collections of poems, she also wrote two novels, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878), an unfinished romance in English, and *Le Journal, de Mademoiselle'd Arvers* (1879), a novel in French and a couple of critical essays. Her death in 1877 at the age of 21, when her creative talent was yet maturing was mourned in the literary circle. *The Saturday Review* wrote about her, "There is every reason to believe that in intellectual power Toru Dutt was one of the most remarkable women that ever lived. Had George Sand or George Eliot died at the age of 21, they would certainly not have left behind them any proof of application or originality superior to those bequeathed to us by Toru Dutt." Later Edward Thompson remarked that her place is with Sappho and Emile Bronte. James Demester, a prominent French critic, too commented on her literary genius, "This daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, French woman at heart, poet in English, prose writer in French; who at the age of eighteen made India acquainted with the poets of French in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions and died at the age of twenty one, in the full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel."

Out of her poetic gamut two most representative poems 'Our Casuarina Tree' and 'Sita' have been selected for detailed analysis in the two units which reflect the Romanticism

and Indian sensibility communicated through English language. M. K. Naik's comments about these poems are noteworthy, "The nostalgia expressed so poignantly in her 'Our Casuarina Tree' and 'Sita' was not manufactured in English, for it was a cause of her soul".

Now we shall take up the poem "Our Casuarina Tree" for analysis.

Let us do a reading of the poem first.

2.4 Text of the poem "Our Casuarina Tree"

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
 Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
 No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose,

When first my casement is wide open thrown
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
 Sometimes, and most in winter, -on its crest
A grey baboon sits statue-like alone
 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence

Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:

Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,

O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For yours sake shall the tree be ever dear!

Blent with your images, it shall arise

In memory till the hot tears blind mine eyes !

What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear

Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?

It is the tree's lament. an eerie speech,

That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unkown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away

In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay.

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith

And the waves gently kissed the classic shore

Of France or Italy, beneath the moon

When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:

And every time the music rose, -before

Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,

Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime

I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay

Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those

Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,

Dearer than life to me, alas! were they-

Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees-like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
‘Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow’ and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh-fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

2.5 Analysis of the poem

This poem has been hailed as Toru Dutt’s masterpiece of descriptive Nature poetry which reminds one of the geniuses of the great Romantic poet John Keats whose poems combine beauty and truth. In this poem Toru Dutt gives the description of a tree in her garden house in Calcutta which to her stands as a symbol of time-present and past, as well as eternity. It also refreshes in her mind the memories of her lost sister and brother.

The poem starts with an objective description. Then the poetess relates it to her personal impressions of this tree at different times and links it with her childhood memories of her lost sister and brother.

Among the poems left by her, the one that attracts, especially our attention is the allegorical poem. “Our Casuarina Tree” consisting of five stanzas. For the poetess, the Indian tree Casuarina, which grows in the courtyard of her house and with which all the reminiscences of her childhood are connected, it the symbol of the motherland and at the same time is the symbol of tenacity, strength and tranquillity. It grows firmly by roots in the earth :

Like a hugh python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee :
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,

Sung darkling from out tree, while men repose.

In the second stanza, Toru describes the casuarina tree in a typical Indian graphic frame :

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest ;
Sometimes, and most in winter, - on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise ; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play ;
And far and near kokilas hail the day.

Further, Toru recollects her dead brother and sister, with whom she played in childhood under the top of Casurina, and once again in the verse the same chain of symbolic images come up : the tree, the motherland-the source of inner poise and tranquillity :

Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay.
When slumbered in his cave the water wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon :
And every time the music rose, - before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
The form, O Tree, as in my happier prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

For its mastery of construction of phrases, and for rhythm and melodiousness, Srinivas Iyengar regards the poem, "Our Casuarina Tree" as a superb piece of writing. It gives an idea about the poetic taste as well as about the craftsmanship of Toru.

Why she loves this tree so intensely for this reason has been very emotionally and thoughtfully conveyed in these lines :

But not because of its magnificence

Dear is the Casuarina to my soul :

Beneath it we have played : though years may roll

O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For yours sake, shall the tree be ever dear.

Not only for this reason, but its recollection ever has been providing delight to her. That is why she consecrates a song 'a lay / unto thy honour' and prays that it should be counted / 'numbered' among 'deathless trees'. Her love for this tree is so intense and true that she wishes that it should stay in her heart for ever and prays "May love defend thee from oblivion's curse."

When we go through the poem, we feel that the poetess is not only describing or reflecting over a tree as John Keats is doing in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," she recaptures the past and also immortalizes these recaptured moments of time. Commenting on the perfection of form, maturity of style and felicity of expression in the poem K. Srinivas Iyengar aptly avers, "The eleven-line stanza form with the rhyme scheme abba, cddc, eee is worthy of Keats himself. In the organization of the poem as a whole and in the finish of the individual stanzas, in its mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound and ideas, 'Our Casuarina Tree' is a superb piece of writing and gives us a taste of what Toru might have done had not the race of her life been so quickly run."

The first two stanzas of the poem are remarkable for the beautiful images created by the poetess.

2.5.1 Critical Comments

The perfect blending of emotion and thought which T. S. Eliot calls "unified sensibility" and considers a hall-mark of the best poetry can be felt while reading this poem. The poetess certainly rises from the personal to the impersonal. The structural unity, aptness of phrases, similes, metaphors and other figures of speech and intensity of feeling and maturity of thought make this poem certainly a "well-wrought Urn". Haydn Moore Williams considers this poem of Toru Dutt perhaps her best poem which combines her love for nature with tender evocation of childhood memories that are doubtless at the source of her return to Indian themes in the last chapter of her brief life." In Padmini Sen Gupta's views, this is "the most revealing of Toru's verses with its nostalgia for the past and inner vision of sublime beauty. This poem alone can number her with the deathless English poets of her age."

2.5.2 Glossary

rugged	—	rough
Python	—	a large snake
indented	—	cut into teeth like points

Summit	—	Top
Scarf	—	the creeper which encircles the trunk of the tree
repose	—	take rest
baboon	—	monkey
Hoar	—	grayish white
Eerie	—	fearful
Fain	—	gladly
Lay	—	lyric

2.6 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have dealt with the emergence of Indian poetry in English, Toru Dutt's life and her creative literary output. We have also discussed the unique amalgamation of Indian sensibility and western traditions in her poetry. A detailed analysis of her poem "Our Casuarina Tree" reveals the chief characteristics of her poetry. In the next Unit we shall critically examine Tom Dutt's another poem "Sita" and also make an assessment of Toru Dutt as a poet.

2.7 Review Questions

1. Who were the early Indian poets who wrote poetry in English ? Comment on the themes and style of their poems.
2. Give a brief account of Toru Dutt's life and works.
3. Discuss the content of Toru Dutt's poem 'Our Casuarina Tree'.
4. Critically examine Toru Dutt's poem "Our Casuarina Tree".

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UNIT-3

TORU DUTT : *SITA*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Toru Dutt as a poet
- 3.2 Introduction to the Poem '*Sita*'
- 3.3 The Text of the Poem '*Sita*'
- 3.4 Analysis of the poem
 - 3.4.1 Critical Comments
 - 3.4.2 Glossary
- 3.5 Let us Sum up
- 3.6 Review Questions
- 3.7 Bibliography

3.0 Aims and Objectives

This Unit aims to introduce and analyse Toru Dutt's poem "Sita" which reveals her love for Indian myths and her sensitivity to women's sufferings and victimization even in the ancient times. A critical assessment of Toru Dutt as a poet will also be made in this Unit. The objectives of this Unit are to enable the students to

- i) understand Toru Dutt's interest in Indian myths and legends and their rendering in her own way
- ii) analyse her poem "Sita" and appreciate her poetic skill to evoke sympathies for Sita and her sufferings.
- iii) know about the thematic and stylistic features of her poetry.

By the end of this Unit, the students will become more familiar with Toru Dutt's achievement and contribution as a poet.

3.1 Toru Dutt as a Poet

Though Toru Dutt in her brief literary career could pen only two volumes of poems *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) yet qualitatively her contribution to the Indian poetry in English in its early phase has been incomparable. When we read her poems in the literary historical context, we find that

hers was “the first solid achievement in Indian English poetry.” Infact, she was the first Indian woman poet who by writing poetry in English interpreted the spirit of India to the west.

Apart from her choice of Indian themes, Indian settings and Indian values, she has been very successful in the articulation of tenderness of feeling and the loveliness of natural beauty in whatever poetic form she chose to write. The hall-mark of her poetic diction and style is the aptness of vocabulary and lucidity which lay bare before the readers her feelings and thoughts and also touch their hearts and make them reflect. Toru was not only a keen observer of the natural scenes and sights as is clear from her poems “Our Casuarina Tree,” “Sindhu,” “The Lotus,” “Baugmaree”, “Sita” and many others. Her this faculty of observation is also visible in her comments on men, women and their manners and her presentation of the sketches of Indian social life and her reflections on various social and political problems. How she highlights the sorrows of a Hindu widow in her poem “Savitri” is remarkable

And think upon the dreadfull curse
of widowhood; the vigils, fasts,
And penances; no life is worse
Than hopeless life, the while it lasts.

While reading it, one is reminded of the portrayal of the plight of widows in Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel *Water*.

Though Toru Dutt was a converted Christian yet her poetic rendering of Hindu myths and legends are a testimony to the fact that she was fully aware of the cultural values they impart and the philosophical vision they embody, and the great respect she had for the Hindu gods and goddesses and great men and women. In his “Introductory Memoir” to *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* Edmund Gosse admits that her ballads “breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly devoid of . . . littleness and frivolity . . .”. Moreover, she did not just narrate these myths and legends, rather gave them her own twist and colouring to present her own point of view. This reveals her maturity of thought at such a young age. The assimilation of three literary traditions. French, Indian and English, in her ballads and legends projects them as “a cultural and philosophical anthropology and a religious and a moral instrument.” Though R. W. Frazer in his *Literary History of India* (1898) comments that in Toru Dutt’s handling the old ballads and legends have “lost all their plaintive cadence” and their “natural charm” as they are wrapped with full sounding music of the Sanskrit,” or “her own classical Bengali” but we cannot agree with Frazer because we do find melody and human sensibility in all her poems. C. N. Srinath proclaims that Toru Dutt can be “easily called a pioneer in children’s poetry as the first poet to tell the Indian tales in English. The tone of the tale and the conscious simplicity of the narrative suggest the audience for whom it was probably meant but the power and conceptual wisdom of the tale and the values that emerge out of the various struggles and tensions and the nobility of characters have a great spell on the adult

imagination as well.” Another noticeable feature of Toru Dutt’s poetry is that though she was greatly influenced by the British Romantic poets, especially, John Keats, William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge yet she did not copy them as such rather adapted their language and style for her own purposes to communicate Indian sensibility and became “adept” in her own contents and style.

Her concern for her own country and her vision when the British colonizers were hegemonizing Indian cultural ethos has been suggested through her poem “The Lotus” in which as an Indian poet, she responsibly addresses the colonizers through the simple icon of lotus, the national flower of India, by fusing it with “western icons of mythic power” “red rose and white lily”. “Toru answers Kipling’s oracular dictum that the East and West are irreconcilable through the innovative projection of an apparently simple icon” remarks Sanjukta Das Gupta in her article “In a Double Bind : Indian Women poets writing in English.”

Thus we see that though quantitatively meagre, qualitatively Toru Dutt’s poetic output is very rich and her appeal both to Indian as well as western readers has been timeless and she is ranked among the great poets in India. Edmund Gosse paid to her a befitting tribute, “It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt. Literature has no honours which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty one, and in languages separated from her own by so deep a chasm, had produced so much of lasting worth.”

3.2 Introduction to the poem “Sita”

The poem “Sita” forms a part of the collection of poems *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* which was published posthumously in 1882 with a foreword by Edmund Gosse who wrote, “We believe that the original English poems which we present to the public for the first time today will be ultimately found to continue Toru’s chief legacy to posterity.” This is considered to be her most mature contribution which shows how much rooted she was into the soil of Hindu thought and tradition. There are nine ballads in this collection based on Indian myths and legends : “Savitri”, “Lakshman”, “Jogadhya Uma”, “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind”, “Dhruva”, “Butto”, “Sindhu”, “Prahlaad” and “Sita” and miscellaneous poems. With these poems a new phase started in the development of Toru Dutt’s poetic genius as she desired to give poetic expression to her intense love for her homeland and its traditions from which she had been alienated for a long period by French and English literatures. Her one year’s study of Sanskrit and the inspiration she got from her recollection of the religious stories told by her mother bring her back to the very heart of India. Haydn Moore Williams remarks about these poems, “Apart from her mastery of English verse forms, the poems show the emergence of an independent poetic individuality. The themes of these ballads are sublime.” Hari Mohan Prasad and Chakradhar Prasad Singh call this collection “a cultural and philosophical anthropology and a religious and moral instrument”. The ballads are not only rich in philosophical thought and moral vision but also reveal the poet’s stylistic maturity, felicity of

expression, descriptive splendour, narrative vigour, lyrical simplicity and romantic remoteness. C. N. Srinath pays a tribute to Toru's contribution to Indian poetry in English with reference to these ballads: "The achievement is admirable when we think of Toru's literary context more than a hundred years ago when she had no local models in poetry to look up to but had all the disadvantages of being a young poet in the midst of elder poets in the family who imitated the familiar modes and styles of English poetry. She can also be called a pioneer in children's poetry as the first poet to tell the Indian tales in English. The tone of the tale and the conscious simplicity of narrative suggest the audience for whom it was probably meant but the power and conceptual wisdom of the tale and the values that emerge out of the various struggles and tensions and the nobility of characters have a great spell on the adult imagination as well."

Now let us read the poem "Sita" first.

3.3 The Text of the poem "Sita"

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot. – There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake
The white swans glide; there, "whirring from the brake,"
The peacock springs; there herds of wild deer race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, dwells in peace, the poet-anchorite.
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
She weeps – for lo! at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay
Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
Is by a mother sung... 'Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day!

When shall those children by their mother's side

Gather, ah me! As erst at eventide ?

3.4 Analysis of the Poem

This is the last ballad in the collection *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* recounting the pathetic tale of Sita from *The Ramayana* narrated by her mother to Toru and her sister and brother which they used to listen with “wide open eyes.” Toru had once written to her French friend Clarisse Bader, “Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita ? I donot think so when I hear my mother chant in the evening, the old lays of our country. I almost always weep. The plight of Sita, when banished for the second time she wanders alone in the vast forest despair and horror filling her soul, is so pathetic that I believe there is no one who could hear it without shedding tears.”

The poem is not a ballad in the strict sense of the term because it does not have a narrative framework and there is more of suggestion and evocation than narration. The poem begins with the poetess recalling the scene when her mother told her three children the sufferings of Sita (at the hands of her husband Rama) who was exiled into the forest (on the loud talk of a washman against her character) and there she started living in the hermitage of the poet – anchorite, Valmiki.

There is a dramatic beginning of the poem showing “three happy children in a darkened room!” The way the mother builds before them the image of the surroundings in the forest near the ashram of the sage Valmiki has been projected in the poem in such a vivid nature – description that we can visualise clearly the picture of the hermitage in the lines:

A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot. – There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake
The white swans glide; there, “whirring from the brake,”
The peacock springs; there herds of wild deer race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, dwells in peace, the poet-anchorite.

The dramatic setting of the poem is evoked further and the curiosity of the reader is aroused through this question “But who is this fair lady ?” who is told to be “weeping” but “not in vain”. The reasons for her weeping have not been stated but left for the reader to recall from the scriptural context. The impact of the tale of “weeping” Sita as narrated by Toru's mother (who also might be shedding tears while telling this “lay” as the line “at every tear she sheds”

suggests) is so intense and powerful on the three children that

Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads,

Though Toru's mother had been telling them other stories also from Hindu scriptures but while narrating this tale, she being a woman and a mother always seemed to have empathized with the plight of Sita, who was then expecting and was like all women victimized in a patriarchal system. The next three lines convey that though the mother seeing her children weeping stopped the tale there and then to melt "the picture" of the sad Sita "from their sight away" but Toru knew that it had such an everlasting impact on the psyche of the children that they would "dream of it until the day."

In the last two lines of the poem, the poet in a nostalgic mood recalls her lost sister and brother who she knows will never gather together by their mother's side to listen to this tale.

3.4.1 Critical Comments

K. R. Srinivas Iyengar hails this poem as "almost perfect" and considers it "a tribute to Toru's mother's genius for story telling. The last two lines are called by him "a poignant elegy on the early death of Abju and Aru". Iyengar further says "Never had Toru written more feelingly or evoked a scene or an emotion as unforgettably." He also calls Toru's this little poem an unflickering lamp which throws light on the quality of her heart. The poem is undoubtedly rich in its pictorial imagery, evincing Toru's love for nature and ability to say "What oft was thought and felt" about women's plight "but never so well expressed."

3.4.2 Glossary

Gaze on	—	stare at
Dense	—	dark
Sunbeam	—	sunlight
Pries	—	peeps
Bloom	—	blossom
Gigantic	—	big
Lucid	—	with clear water
Brake	—	bush
Springs	—	jumps
Herds	—	flocks, groups

Gleam	—	shine
grain	—	sand
dwells	—	lives
Poet-anchorite	—	supreme poet Valmiki
Fair	—	beautiful
Amain	—	continuously
Evoked	—	revived
lay	—	story

3.5 Let us sum up

In this Unit we have discussed the poetic skill of Toru Dutt with special reference to her poetic rendering of Indian myths and legends. A detailed analysis of her poem “Sita” reveals the pictorial as well as evocative qualities of the poem. The discussion on Toru Dutt as a poet has highlighted various aspects of her poetry and its universal appeal.

We hope, you will read more of her poems to appreciate her poetic genius.

3.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss in brief the significance of Toru Dutt’s collection of poems *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*.
2. Critically analyse Toru Dutt’s poem “Sita”.
3. Comment briefly on the images used in the poem “Sita”.
4. Make an assessment of Toru Dutt as a poet.

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UNIT-4

SAROJINI NAIDU : *PALANQUIN BEARERS*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Sarojini Naidu : Life and Works
- 4.2 A Brief Account of “*The Golden Threshold*”
- 4.3 Introduction to the Poem “*Palanquin Bearers*”
- 4.4 The Text of the Poem “*Palanquin Bearers*”
- 4.5 Analysis of the Poem
 - 4.5.1 Critical Comments
 - 4.5.2 Glossary
- 4.6 Let us sum up
- 4.7 Review Questions
- 4.8 Bibliography

4.0 Objectives

This Unit discusses the life and works of Sarojini Naidu, a prominent first generation Indian English poet of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the uniqueness of her poetic themes and style in her early poems. An analysis of her famous poem “Palanquin Bearers” has also been made.

The objectives of this unit are to acquaint the students with

- (i) the lyrical qualities of Naidu’s poems
- (ii) her sensitivity to Indian scenes and people
- (iii) the life and works of Naidu
- (iv) her poem “Palanquin Bearers” and the interpretation of the poem.

By the end of this Unit, the students will know peculiar features of Naidu’s early poetry and her love and poetic / lyrical rendering of Indian themes, scenes and images.

4.1 Sarojini Naidu : Life and Works

After Toru Dutt, among the Indian women poets writing in English, Sarojini Naidu is

the most popular one and her poetry represents the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism. Because of the lyrical qualities of her songs and her singing talent, she is known as the nightingale of India, “Bharat Kokila”. She was more than a poet and a singer who also contributed to the political, social and cultural advancement of India in many ways.

Born on February 13, 1879 in Hyderabad, she was the eldest daughter of Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, a scientist and pioneering educationist. She was a born poet and wrote her first poem at the age of eleven while she was solving a sum in algebra. She brought distinction to herself by being the first girl to pass her matriculation from Madras University at the age of twelve and by standing first in the examination. At the age of sixteen she went to England on a scholarship for higher studies and during her stay at Kings’ College, London and at Girton Cambridge University, she met two great English poets and critics, Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds who guided and encouraged her to write poetry on Indian themes. In 1898, she married Govindarajulu Naidu, ten years her senior, with whom she was passionately in love. In her father’s home at Hyderabad, she was brought up in the liberal, imaginative and intellectual milieu, which was steeped in both Hindu and Muslim cultural traditions. Her vast reading of English literature, Hindu mythology, Urdu and Persian folk-lore prompted her poetic creativity and though the medium of her poetry is a western language, yet her content, poetic idiom, settings, feelings, thought and imagery, all are typically Indian. Her early poetry focuses on Indian themes and deals with “the oriental world of beauty and mystery” which is introduced to the occidental world. Mulk Raj Anand remarked about her poetry “Although she had adopted a western language and a western technique to express herself, she seems to me to be in the main Hindustani tradition of Ghalib, Zok, Mir, Hali and Iqbal.” Her three collections of poems *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917) made her popular in India as well as in the west. The first edition of her collected poems was published under the title *The Sceptred Flute* in 1943.

Under the influence of Mahatama Gandhi, Lok Manya Tilak and Gopal Krishan Gokhale she changed from a romantic singer to a determined and passionate fighter for the freedom of her country. After the publication of her third volume of poems *The Broken Wing* in 1917, she stopped writing poetry and emerged as a great patriot, a leading political figure, a champion of women’s rights, a fiery writer and orator. She also went to jail many a time and had the honour of being the first woman to preside over the annual session of Congress in 1925. She was also the first woman Governor of United Provinces till 1949. Her administrative skills as a leader, crusader, soldier and statesman were remarkable.

When she became fully preoccupied with politics, though she could not spare much time for writing poetry yet she wrote many poems which could not be published during her life (She passed away on 2nd March 1949 at Lucknow). The fourth volume of her poems titled *The Feather of Dawn* was published posthumously by her daughter in 1961.

4.2 A Brief Account of *The Golden Threshold*

Sarojini Naidu's "Palanquin Bearers" is the opening poem of the first section of the first collection of her poems titled *The Golden Threshold* which was published in England in 1905 by William Heinemann, London with an introduction written by Arthur Symons. The name to the book was given after the name of her house at Hyderabad "The Golden Threshold" and the book was dedicated to Edmund Gosse, who Sarojini says, "first showed me the way to the golden threshold". The book received very encouraging reviews from western readers for their simplicity like William Blake's poems, for their music and lyricism, freshness of Eastern colour, "undeniable beauty and distinction." *Glasgow Herald* remarked "The pictures are of the East; it is true; but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East or West." A reviewer in another newspaper *The Morning Post* comments that in this collection some small poems have described "the daily life of the East which has an astonishing vividness. It is a rare art which gives the effect of poetry in what is, after all, only the accurate statement of what the eyes have seen. The book is one not merely of accomplishment but beautiful verse, it is the expression of a temperament". In most of the poems like "Palanquin Bearers," "The Snake Charmer," "The Bangle Sellers," "Coromandel Fishers," Sarojini Naidu, says K. Srinivas Iyengar, "tried to catch and reproduce in English the lilt and atmosphere of some of the folk songs." With this collection Sarojini Naidu gained much fame and the book also heralded a new period in the history of Indian English poetry.

Now we shall discuss briefly the background and setting of the poem "Palanquin Bearers".

4.3 Introduction to the Poem "Palanquin Bearers"

The poem "Palanquin Bearers" was composed on Aug 7, 1903 by Sarojini Naidu and appeared in her first collection of poems *The Golden Threshold* which has been divided into three sections "Folk Songs," "Songs for Music" and "Poems". Like many other poems in this collection on typical Indian scenes, themes and settings, e.g., Indian weavers, corn-grinders, snake charmers, bangle sellers, Indian dancers, coromandel fishers, this poem too is a typically Indian poem which sings of and presents before us a very authentic picture of the arduous life of palanquin bearers who pass their life singing and doing their job joyfully. The sight of Palanquin Bearers (two or four in number) was a usual sight in Hyderabad and other parts of India during the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century, palkis used as a mode of conveyance. Even now in many hilly and other areas of India, a bride is carried to her husband's house in a palki and the bearers of the palki usually sing songs in a rhythmic harmony with their footsteps on the move and the sound of the soft music engulfs the surroundings. In a romantic setting, in this poem Sarojini Naidu has imaginatively projected an image of the palanquin bearers carrying the bride in the palanquin.

Let us read the text of the poem first.

4.4 The Text of the Poem “*Palanquin Bearers*”

Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She **sways** like a flower in the wind of our song;
She **skims** like a bird on the foam of a stream.
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
She **springs** like a **beam** on the **brow** of the tide,
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

4.5 Analysis of the Poem

After reading the poem we find that the poem describes the gentle and soft way in which the bride is being carried by the palanquin bearers in their palanquin. Though the task of carrying the palanquin with the weight of a person inside is very hard which gives cuts to the shoulders of the bearers also but the rhythm of their song and steps suggests that they are unmindful of the weight and also of the cuts received on their shoulders and they are very gladly and gently bearing the lady in their palanquin. Sarojini Naidu has very vividly captured their humming song in its perfect rhythm and music.

In the two stanzas each of six rhymed lines, the first and the fifth lines of each stanza serve as a refrain. The rhythm of the poem is of swift movement which corresponds with the swaying movement of the palanquin and also of the rise and fall of the footsteps of the bearers. The remarkable thing in this song as in other songs of Naidu is that the tune and the movement go together. What we find is “Kinesthetic image” which we call the image of “felt motion” conveyed through the action verbs like “sways,” “skims,” “floats,” “glide,” “sing,” “hangs,” “springs,” “falls”. When the poem (as well as the journey) progresses, the palanquin bearers describe through a string of seven similes; “sways like a flower,” “skims like a bird,” “floats like a laugh,” “hangs like a star,” “springs like a beam,” “falls like a tear”, “we bear her along like a

pearl on a string,” the beauty, lightness, delicacy, richness and power of the lady in the palanquin as well as the gentle and rhythmic rise and fall of the palanquin on the shoulders of the bearers which they are carrying in a gay and light mood. Out of these images a few are vivid and concrete, like skimming on the brow of the tide and a tear falling from the eyes of a bride. Other images, like a laugh from the lips of a dream, swinging like a flower in the wind of a song and hanging like a star in the dew of song are abstract images, which reveal the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites on Sarojini Naidu. The quick succession of the images evokes not only the impact of swiftness and rhythm of the gait of the palanquin bearers and image of the bride, it also evokes various feelings and thoughts about them as well as about the bride. For example, the image “she falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride” is suggestive of the sadness of an Indian bride on being separated from her parents.

The poem also suggests indirectly different types of women-young, delicate girls, beautiful maidens, brides and princesses the palanquin bearers carry. The images of birds, flowers, foam, laughter, pearls, stars, dew, a beam of light and a tear also paint a concrete and fabulous picture of a beautiful woman sitting in the palanquin which the bearers are carrying. Moreover, the gentle, swinging and soft manner in which the palanquin bearers are carrying the bride is also due to the elasticity of the wooden pole from which the palanquin is hanging and the tenderness of the lady and may be due to the fear of their tyrannical master-the husband or father of the lady.

4.5.1 Critical Comments

The poem has been hailed by B. S. Mathur in his essay “Sarojini Naidu: A Poetess of Sweetness and Light” “as an excellent example of her words, images and perpetual music.” This is typical of Sarojini Naidu’s style and her Indian sensibility. The entire setting and images are a part of Indian ethos and the psyche of Indian readers, who are familiar with all these things. A few critics consider this poem not only specifically Indian in setting, music and imagery but the emotions and feelings it evokes are human and universal. We can also say that the poem is a fine example of W.B. Yeats’s concept of “Unity of being” in which it is difficult to separate the dancer from the dance. A. N. Dwivedi’s comments in this context are very appropriate, “The tone lives in complete rapport with the heartbeats of the beauty inside. The palanquin, the bearers, the inmate inside, the song and the springy movement – all fuse into one another. There is only one entity – the poem. The poetess too has been lost in the poem. One could search her in the poem’s rhythm.”

4.5.2 Glossary

lightly	–	gently
bear	–	carry
sways	–	swings from side to side.

wind	–	rhythm
skims	–	moving fast just above the surface
gaily	–	happily
softly	–	gently
springs	–	bounces
beam	–	ray of light
brow	–	top

4.6 Let Us Sum Up

In this Unit we have introduced you to another Indian woman poet of pre-independence era who wrote poetry in English and also participated in multi-farious activities related to her country. We have highlighted the chief characteristics of her poetry and through the analysis of one of her early poems “Palanquin Bearers,” we have tried to discuss her uniqueness of themes and style. In the next Unit, we shall analyse the poem “Conquest” from the later phase of her poetic career and study in detail her achievement, contribution and place in the history of Indian English Poetry.

4.7 Review Questions

1. Give a brief account of Sarojini Naidu’s life and works.
2. Critically examine Naidu’s poem “Palanquin Bearers”
3. In which respects can “Palanquin Bearers” be called a representative poem of Sarojini Naidu ?

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UNIT-5

SAROJINI NAIDU : CONQUEST AND *THE FEATHER OF DAWN*

Structure

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Introduction to the Poem *Conquest* and *The Feather of Dawn*.
- 5.4 The Text of the poem *Conquest*
- 5.5 Analysis of the poem
 - 5.5.1 Critical Comments
 - 5.5.2 Glossary
- 5.6 Sarojini Naidu as a Poet
- 5.7 Let us sum up
- 5.8 Review Questions
- 5.9 Bibliography

5.0 Objectives

This Unit aims to introduce the students to the fourth volume of Sarojini Naidu's poems *The Feather of Dawn* (1961) which was published after her death by her daughter. We will also discuss the political background of the composition of the poem "Conquest" and analyse it in detail highlighting it as a marker of her transformation as a poet and as a human being, under the influence of her political mentor, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, whom she had met first in 1902. We shall also make an assessment of Sarojini Naidu as a poet. By the end of the Unit, the students will be able to

- 1) know about the different themes of the poetry of Sarojini Naidu in her last volume of poems *The Feather of Dawn*
- 2) interpret her poem "Conquest"
- 3) understand her growth regarding the object of her love
- 4) appreciate the greatness of her poetry.

5.1 Introduction

In this Unit we are going to make an analysis of Naidu's poem "Conquest" which belongs to the later phase of her poetic career when she had actively involved herself in the political and administrative activities of her country and a detailed discussion on her achievement and contribution as a poet to the growth of Indian poetry in English.

Some critics believe that this poem was composed by Naidu on her transformation from a poet to a politician. Her biographers record that under the influence of Gopal Krishan Gokhale she decided to join the ongoing national movement for the freedom of India. She had cherished the desire that she would win the hearts of people with her poetic talent but she admits in the poem that God sent Gokhale as His messenger and also as the embodiment of human love to acquaint her with the sorrows and sufferings of her countrymen. Gokhale was able to conquer her heart and also made her change the course of her life which resulted into the composition of the poem "Conquest".

Now we will discuss in more detail the background of the poem "Conquest" and her poetic collection *The Feather of Dawn* (1961) (which was published posthumously) in which this poem is included.

5.2 Introduction to the Poem *Conquest* and *The Feather of Dawn*

The poem, *Conquest* having an autobiographical element, contrasts the days when Sarojini Naidu's daily and poetic life was marked by self-love and poetic fantasies with the days when she was overpowered by her love for her fellow countrymen, their woes and miseries. It was the influence of Gokhale's love which brought a shift in her outlook to life and expanded her vision of love. He made her see and love the pains and miseries of others which she considers God's doing to break her pride, which she had nurtured in herself because of the name and fame she had gained in the literary circle. A realization of others' sufferings made her open to human love to which she was earlier blind. The poem thus talks of the spiritual growth of the poetess – from self love to human love and also acknowledges her love for Gokhale which opened her to the sufferings of her countrymen and participate with passion and commitment in India's struggle for Independence. The poetess comes to feel that whereas self-love blinds the person, human love widens the vision and opens various channels. Moreover, being made open to human love, the poetess realizes that the kingdom of God is all love and unless there is love for fellow beings and belief in the love of God, no sacrifice can be made for any cause.

The poem "Conquest" is among the thirty seven poems included in the last volume of poems by Naidu *The Feather of Dawn* published by Messrs, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, in 1961. These poems, written by Naidu in July-August, 1927, had not been previously published and in 1928, she had told her friend Dr. Amaranatha Jha about her desire of writing a book *Feathers of Dawn*, which she could not publish during her life time but her daughter, Padmaja

Naidu collected these poems, edited them and published them under the title *The Feather of Dawn* that her mother had chosen. The title is very significant which has been derived from “a dance by the *Denishawn Dancers* based on the Hopi Indian legend that a feather blown into the air at dawn, if caught by a breeze and carried out of sight, marks the opening of an auspicious day.” Out of the thirty seven poems in this volume five are sonnets and others are lyrics. The opening two poems : “In Gokhale’s Garden” and “Lokmanya Tilak” are tributes to two prominent freedom fighters : Gopal Krishan Gokhale whom the editor hails as “the great saint and soldier of our national righteousness. His life was a sacrament and his death was a sacrifice in the cause of Indian unity...” and Bal Gangadhar Tilak who “taught our nation freedom’s Gayatri.” Other poems deal with various other famous personalities of India who contributed to India’s freedom struggle, and many other issues pertaining to India and her people, her love for nature, love of Radha for Krishna and various other forms of love. In most of these poems we discern her poetic and spiritual growth and the poem “Conquest” is a specimen of it. Now we shall analyse the poem in detail.

Let us read the text of the poem “Conquest” first.

5.3 The Text of the Poem *Conquest*

Life gave me joy and song for dower,
Laughter and grace and shining fame,
Hope like a forest tree in flower,
Dreams with reverberant wings of flame.
God troubled in His high domain,
Sent you, O Love, from starry spheres
With quick and ardent gifts of pain
To teach me tears, to teach me tears.

You took my chalice joy and spilt
Its honey in the sands of drouth,
Stole from my song its silver lilt,
Smote lyric laughter on the mouth.
You took Fame’s beacon torch that threw
Worldwide the lustre of its beams,
Plucked bare the boughs of hope and slew

My wingéd dreams, my wingéd dreams.

I stood uncomfórted, alone,
Amid life's ruined loveliness,
Vanquished with woe. From His bright throne,
God smiled, beholding my distress.
Ruthless, serene, magnificent,
You towered above my grief and cried,
"I am His chosen instrument
To break your pride, to break your pride".

"You whose bold vision flung afar
Rich spells of your dominion,
Claimed kinship with the morning star,
Sought friendship with the midnight sun.
Lo, I am he with strength endowed
To hold your captive heart in fee...
Proud heart to which earth's nations bowed
Bow down to me, bow down to me!"

5.4 Analysis of the Poem

The poem begins with the poetess recalling how before she fell in love with her countrymen, her life was filled with joy, laughter, hope, dreams and fantasies and was oblivious of pain and sorrows. She enjoyed name and fame as a poetess and took great pride in it. But it was a God's plan to wean her away from this self indulgence and teach her about her wider responsibilities by awakening her to the pain in the world and by making her pass through "a valley of tears" as she says in the following lines :

God troubled in His high domain,
Sent you, O Love, from starry spheres
With quick and ardent gifts of pain.

To teach me tears, to teach me tears.

When she became Love's captive, there was a complete change in her life and her earlier joy and laughter were replaced by pain, grief and tears. With this there came an end to her pride also. Her contact with the great political leaders like Mahatama Gandhi, Lokmanya Tilak and especially Gopal Krishan Gokhale drew her attention towards the woes and miseries of the Indian people. Now instead of singing lyrics of love, joy and laughter, she fell in love with the suffering humanity and empathized with the suffering people which gave her only grief and tears. Though she regrets that this "Love" had made her lonely and miserable and she describes the new found "Love" as hard and cruel which has hurt her and broken her pride remorselessly, Love now feels proud of bringing about a change in her heart which earlier felt self-complacent because of her blissful communion with heavenly bodies.

The last two lines of the poem show a complete transformation of the poetess who has now surrendered herself completely before this love and has accepted it as God's will. This complete resignation on her part also shows her humanity and the acceptance of the suffering, pain and misery of her fellow countrymen as the reality for which she should do something. The poem thus is a confession by the poetess how a change in outlook to life and her decision to plunge into the on going struggle for India's Independence to alleviate the tortures of Indians at the hands of Britishers was all God's plan for which Gopal Krishan Gokhale was chosen as a human agency to inspire and motivate her to come out of her "ivory dower" of singing lilted songs about beauty and ordinary life and do something great for India and Indians through her participation in "political activism".

5.4.1 Critical Comments

By presenting a contrast through retrospection, between two attitudes to life and the objects of love through a transition in the tone from gaiety to gravity, Sarojini Naidu has not only projected the transformation in journey of her life, which she at the point of transition found painful but accepting it as God's will she decided to plunge actively and committedly to the field of politics for the sake of her country and countrymen to make them free from the sufferings under the British yoke. Though she curses "Love" at one point for breaking her away from her comfortable attitudes to life, but soon she realizes its boon and bows down willingly before it, considering it a part of Divine Love for her. The poem thus is marked not only by self-introspection, self-analysis through retrospection, it is also a realization on the part of the poetess that she is among "the chosen few" to accomplish higher tasks than to please and remain pleased with amusing people by singing lyrics. It thus is not the conquest of her heart by the love of Gokhale alone, it can also be called the conquest of Naidu of her own self also which prepares her to fulfil her duties as a human being.

5.4.2 Glossary

dower – endowment

reverberant	–	re-echoing
domain	–	heavenly kingdom
starry spheres	–	regions full of stars, sky
ardent	–	very enthusiastic
chaliced joy	–	happiness kept in a large cup
drough	–	desert
lilt	–	strong rhythm of music
smote	–	hit hard
beacon torch	–	a guiding light
uncomforted	–	unsoothed
ruined	–	damaged
ruthless	–	hard and cruel
afar	–	from a very long distance
captive	–	detained as a prisoner
bow down	–	to bend body forward respectfully

5.5 Sarojini Naidu as a Poet

With her four collections of poems, Sarojini Naidu has carved for herself a significant niche in the field of Indian English poetry. Having started writing poetry at the age of eleven which she confesses came to her “spontaneously,” by the age of sixteen (when she went to England for studies) she had written many poems which she carried with her to England where on her meeting with Edmurd Gosse she presented these to him for comments. On reading the poems written in the imitation of English poets especially P.B. Shelley and John Keats, Gosse appreciated her poetic talent but advised her to write about her land, “to be a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever, machine-made imitator of English classics.” She destroyed her earlier poems and following the advice of her poetical mentors, Edmund Gosse, Arthur Symons and a few other members of the Rhymers Club she wrote many original poems, which were published in a few English journals, anthologies and selections of verses. Arthur Symons through a letter implored her to get these published in a collection which really thrilled her and the result was her publication of three collections of poems in her original style, making Indian folk -lores, themes, settings and people the subject matter of these poems. Her three poems: “The Soul’s Prayer,” “In Salutation to Eternal Peace” and “To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus” were included in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (Oxford, 1916) which was a matter of great honour for her. She received a great critical acclaim in the West and a plethora

of critical reviews in various periodicals are a proof of it. In India too she started getting recognized for the beauty, music, images and concern for India and her people and for interpreting the East to the West. But as David McCutcheon in his article "Indian Poetry in English" observes that she "came under the condemnation of her countrymen, who also "accused" her of "pseudo-Indianism" He quotes Latika Basu's words who says about Sarojini Naidu's concerns in her poetry : "She merely continues the picture of India painted by Anglo-Indian and English writers, a land of bazaars, full of bright colours and perfumes, and peopled with picturesque wandering minstrels and snake-charmers". Hence a mixed response to Naidu's poetry reveals that she was getting noticed in the literary circles. In spite of the negative critique from a few quarters, she retained her individuality of themes, style and kept on singing like a bird and with the outpourings of a feminine heart.

Though Willaim Walsh described her poetry as "emotional tuberculosis" and the 1959 *Kavita Manifesto* (started by P Lal) claimed that "the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu" and the realistic poetry started emerging after her, we cannot fully agree to these views because however ordinary and simple and non serious her early poems may seem just the lyrics sung but there is definitely "an undercurrent of serious thought" in most of them as Dr. Amaranath Jha points out in his article "The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu." Another critic S. Sivaraman in his essay "The Philosophy of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's poetry avers that it is a profound truth that poetry, especially lyrical expresses a philosophy of life. Since philosophy is an explanation of life, every lyrical poet unconsciously does expound it and Naidu's is "a philosophy of giving away one's love and energy in the cause of good in the living present, supremely hopeful of the ultimate destiny and supremely happy in the privilege of giving." A. N. Dwivedi too believes that "Her poems set forth an emotional explanation of human life in its variegated aspects" and her poems do deliver a message in her own unique style. "It is the message of a self-surrendering life of love in the midst of Nature or of an indomitable struggle of love on behalf of the poor, the lowly, and the suffering." K. R. Srinivas Iyengar calls Sarojini Naidu's poetry "the poetry of the soul" in quest of love of God.

On whatever themes, i.e., nature, love, patriotism, life and death, Indian scenes, gender issues and many others, Naidu has written either before she joined politics or after that under the influence of Gokhale whom she had met in 1902, what we find is the warmth, compassion and love of a woman's heart. Though she has not written on a large variety of themes and her range is comparatively limited but she handled each subject matter with "superb grace and skill" and as "a master craftsman." Asloob Ahmad Ansari's comments ("The Poetry of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu") about Sarojini Naidu's achievement as a poet are quite comprehensive and noteworthy: "We relish her poetry not because of its metaphysical conceits, its devotional fervour or its moral bearings. We are fascinated by it because she seems to be speaking to us in familiar tones on subjects with which we are so thoroughly acquainted. She is a lyrical poet who expresses the fluctuating fortunes of love in snatches of poetry. Her vision is comprehensive and catholic and her interests wide-ranging. She not only sympathizes with her fellow human

beings but falls in love with all that belongs to the soil. In her love poetry, something seems to be precipitated out of the depths of her being which she is unable to suppress or resist. It is the quality of downright sincerity and deep warmth that marks them out from poems written on commonplace topics. When the precise and appropriate emotion is missing, she degenerates into mere rhetoric that fails to create any abiding impression. She has reached the acme of excellence in her poetry.”

Though she desired to be the John Keats of Indian poetry in English yet she has emerged as a great poet by her individual poetic talent and artistic perfection, on the scenario of Indian English literature. Edmund Gosse admitted in his introduction to *The Bird of Time* that “she is the most brilliant, the most original, as well as the most correct, of all the natives of Hindustan who have written in English.” Paying a tribute to her poetic and political vision, in India’s Parliament in April 1949, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru called her “a great nationalist and mighty internationalist.”

After a brief discussion of Sarojini Naidu as a poet we can conclude with M. K. Naik’s comment about her contribution and place in the history and growth of Indian English poetry : “her best poetry is not just a faded echo of the feeble voice of decadent Romanticism, but an authentic Indian English lyric utterance exquisitely tuned to the composite Indian ethos with all its opulence and splendour.”

5.6 Let us Sum up

In this Unit we have analysed in detail the poem “Conquest” written in the later phase of the poetic career of Sarojini Naidu which marks a shift in her attitude from the narrow range of love for Indian scenes, sights and people to her love for her country and countrymen especially to their sufferings. The poem is confessional in nature and shows her poetic and personal growth and ushers in her political career. It is reflective of the vision of the poet who decided to enter the political world of Pre-independence India to work with love for poor and miserable Indian masses. We have also made an assessment of Sarojini Naidu as a poet.

After having gone through these two units on Sarojini Naidu, you should read more of her poems and the critical books mentioned in the selected readings to know more about her.

5.7 Review Questions

1. How did the poetess feel when ‘Love’ made her captive?
2. Give an account of the speaker’s life before and after falling in love.
3. Critically analyse the poem “Conquest”.
4. Make an assessment of Sarojini Naidu as a poet.

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UNIT-6

SRI AUROBINDO : SAVITRI CANTO I : THE SYMBOL DAWN

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 About the Author
 - 6.2.1 Life and Personality
 - 6.2.2 Literary Background
 - 6.2.3 His Works
- 6.3 *Savitri* as an Epic
- 6.4 The Text
 - 6.4.1 Detailed Critical Summary
 - 6.4.2 Glossary
 - 6.4.3 *Savitri* as a Legend and a Symbol
 - 6.4.4 Mysticism in “*Savitiri*”
 - 6.4.5 Model Explanations
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Review Questions
- 6.7 Bibliography

6.0 Objectives

The present unit aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. to enable the reader to know about the life, personality and works of Sri Aurobindo.
2. to enable the reader to study Aurobindo’s art with simplicity and clarity.
3. to enable the reader how to explain and interpret the text in one’s own words.
4. to enable the reader to discuss various literary devices used by Aurobrindo in his work.
5. to enable the reader to appreciate and evaluate the given text.

6. to develop the ability of the reader how to bring forth hidden meanings in the text.
7. to show that Sri Aurobindo has used the epic form of poetry by choosing the mythological story of Satayavan and Savitri to exhibit the Eastern philosophy of Redemption and Eternal life.

6.1 Introduction

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is the longest epic in the English language. It was completed in fifty years. In it Aurobindo displays flawless command over blank verse. It can be ranked as the greatest epic in English language after Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is a great epic which ushers in a new age in poetic creation. It has an Indian legendary background. The story of Satyavan and Savitri occurs in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata* (Cantos 291-297). Sri Aurobindo turns it into a symbol of the quest of humanity for the crown of immortality. It is in this poem that seven cantos, making a total of about 700 lines in original Sanskrit, that Sri Aurobindo has expanded and transformed into a modern English epic in 12 Books, of 49 cantos, speared over nearly 24000 lines, It is the poetic record of spiritual experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The combination of poetry and philosophy that we find in it is untraceable anywhere else in Indo-Anglian poetry. Through symbols and images Sri Aurobindo expresses his own yogic experiences and realizations.

6.2 About the Author

6.2.1 Life and Personality

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), a professor, scholar, poet, freedom fighter, journalist, philosopher, dramatist, psychologist, literary critic, translator and original interpreter of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, seer and yogi was a versatile genius, He belonged to a prosperous and prestigious family of Bengal. He was sent to England for studies at the age of seven. His brothers also were with him. When they came back they took interest in literature. Aurobindo took much interest in Indian culture, literature, yoga and mysticism. He was in the Baroda State Service from 1893 to 1906. He actively participated in the freedom struggle. He settled in Pondicherry, which was a French colony. He established Aurobindo Ashram there. In 1914 a French woman named Mira Richard joined him in his spiritual quest and accepted him as her 'Guru'. Since then, he is popularly known as the saint of Pondicherry. His reputation as a mystic, yogi, philosopher and religious thinker has obscured his greatness as a poet and critic of literature, though the great rishi considered himself to be first and foremost a poet. His admirers did nothing to correct the prejudices as they seemed more interested in the mystic, the sage, the prophet at the cost of the poet. There is hardly any poet in world's history from Dante to the present time who had Aurobindo's kind of equipment to write poetry. His creative span stretches over more than sixty years and runs to some thirty thousand pages. He wrote learnedly on Indian polity, philosophy, art and culture.

In 1947, India got independence on Sri Aurobindo's birthday, 15th August. He was glad of the birthday present but he did not like the partition of India. Less than three years later, he passed away on 5th December 1950.

6.2.2 Literary Background

The origin of Indo-Anglian poetry dates back to the twenties of the nineteenth century. For the sake of convenience the development of Indo-Anglian poetry can be divided into the following stages.

1. The Age of Pioneers (1820-1870)
2. The Era of Indian Renaissance (1870-1900)
3. The Era of Political Awakening

Or

The Gandhian Era (1900-1947)

4. The Era of Independence (1947-)

The poets of the first stage used to imitate Wordsworth and other romantic poets of Britain. The second stage i.e., the the Era of Indian Renaissance produced great poets like Aru Dutt, Toru Dutt and Romesh Chandra Dutt. They had greater command over English than their predecessors. They exhibited great ability and originality in bringing Indo-Anglian poetry on a high level of poetic excellence. The poetry of Era of Political Awakening vibrates with intense patriotism and political awareness. Tagore, Naidu and Aurobindo are the dominant poets of this era. They wrote about social, political and spiritual aspect of Indian life. Sri Aurobindo remained a staunch advocate of Indian culture. He made abiding contribution to Indo-Anglian poetry by virtue of his narrative power, polished and refined diction and innovation in meters. His poems are notable for originality. In poem after poem he expresses his own experiences.

6.2.3 His Works

Sri Aurobindo's poetic output is enormous. His span of creativity covers a period from 1980 when he was in England to 1950 when he died in Pondhicherry. He tried his hand at a number of poetic forms, and always with consummate success. He wrote lyrics, sonnets, narrative poems, epics, poetic plays, besides numerous translations and adaptations. His chief works are following :

1. Songs of Myrtilla
2. The Life Divine
3. Essay on the Gita

4. A Defence of Indian Culture
5. The Secret of the Vedas
6. The Ideal of Humanity
7. The Psychology of Social Development
8. The Future Poetry
9. Savitri
10. Poems Past and Present

6.3 *Savitri* as an Epic

Features of the Epic

An epic has been defined as a long narrative poem dealing with the war-life adventures of some national hero, his exploits being of great significance for his country. It has well marked story-interest and unity of structure. It brings into its fold the various aspects of the life of the nation, and reflects the very spirit of the times in which it is written. Its action is cosmic as it sometimes moves on from this earth to the world above, and sometimes goes down to the world below. Supernatural beings, angels, gods and goddesses, are shown as taking active interest in the fate of the hero, and also taking sides in the wars and battles that might be going on. The narrative is conducted throughout in a sublime, dignified and elevated language, as befits the lofty action of the epic.

Broadly speaking, an epic is a long poem, divided into Books and Cantos, dealing with a subject of vital importance to mankind, full of moral teaching, showing the struggle between evil and good, ultimately good attaining victory, incorporating the supernatural machinery, full of the descriptions of battles. Traditionally the epic is a great poetic story of man or world or the gods ; it has been a vigorous presentation of external action ; the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggle of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great epic of India, the pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us. It has also been a story of primitive wars and adventures. The epic of the classical lore began with an invocation to the Muse or some other Divine Spirit or God, was written in one and the same metre ; had as its hero a superman or God, full of virtues, and the chief purpose was man's welfare.

Epic Features in '*Savitri*'

In numerous respects, particularly in form and structure, *Savitri* is the epic of the classical lore, not of the Greek and Latin type, but of the Indian type, having almost all the characteristics of the epic mentioned by Mammata in his *Kavyaprakasha*. It has a heroine of extra-ordinary prowess ; it is written in one and the same metre, that is, blank verse; its language and style are sublime ; its theme is lofty : its hero Satyavan is Truth incarnated. Gods and their agents - Yama and Narad also appear in the epic. It is divided into three parts,

twelve books, or twenty six cantos (yet incomplete). It has a beginning, a middle and even in its present form has an end. It follows, however, double time and double action. Though it is not full of traditional battles of classical epic, yet here the conflict is between a woman and Yama; and the forces of Life. Further, it is also strong in the story interest, its basis being the well known Mahabharata legend of Savitri and Satyavan. It possesses unity of structure in a remarkable degree. Suspense is maintained throughout, and characters are introduced in the epic manner; the range of action is also cosmic, and appeal is universal.

‘Savitri’ as an Epic of ‘Soul’

Savitri is ‘a cosmos poem’, an epic of soul. It is ‘the Super-Epic Yoga-Shastra’, the Yogic Sadhana of Yogi-poet. It is no mere story of Savitri and Satyavan but also the story of Man in the universe. It is a mixture of epic, legend and symbol. It is born out of Sri Aurobindo’s ‘own yogic consciousness’. According to Aurobindo, it is a “mixture of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimated with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised.” (The Future Poetry).

It is concerned with truth and knowledge or wisdom. The truths it deals with are uncommon and unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to the introdden domain. Much of its action is internal, not physical but spiritual. The battle is fought, not on an earthly terrain, but on the high plateau of the soul.

The poem opens on the day when Satyavan is destined to die in accordance with the prophecy made by Narad Muni. Twelve passionate months of conjugal love are over, and it is the dawn of the fateful day, as also the “Symbol Dawn” of a new epoch in cosmic history. There is, thus “double-time” in Savitri. There is also “Double-action” in it. One the material level of the poem begins on the day Satyavan is to die and ends with the defeat of Death and the reunion of Satyavan and Savitri here on earth. On the spiritual plane, it involves the issue between world annihilation and world survival and ends with the defeat of a “partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature”. The problem of “threatening Death and the hope of New Life” which Aurobindo dealt with in *The Life Divine* is posed again in Savitri, but in terms of poetry. As mentioned by Dr. Iyengar, “The great spiritual drama unfolded in Savitri is thus really played in the theatre of the human soul, for Asuric power can be sounted, mastered and transformed only by spiritual power; and so the poem ends with the defeat of a “partial and temporary darkness of the Soul and Nature”. It is the prerogative of the awakened soul, acquiring a clear sense of direction and power and poise of movement, to tunnel through death-daunted Life and Time to the bliss everlasting at the far end. Even as Satyavan with Savitri’s help lives down the invasion of Night and Twilight and emerges into the clear light of Day, the human soul too (which is the spearhead of the evolutionary advance), led by the Supreme’s gift of Grace, overcomes the limitations of the Ignorance and the obscurities and contradictions of mental life, and achieves the bliss of divine or superconscient life.”

Even in the opening Cantos we get sufficient hints of the divine origin and status of Savitri :

To live with grief, to confront death on her road, -
 The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.
 Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,
 Awaiting her ordeal's abode.
 Outcast from her inborn felicity,
 Accepting life's obscured terrestrial robe,
 Hiding herself even from those she loved,
 The Godhead greater by a human fate.

Only Savitri, being the Mother Divine, knows the struggle ahead after the dawn, the battle that must be fought and won before the following dawn. She has to confront with the riddle of man's birth and life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night. She is thus 'the great World-Mother'. The human soul and the divine are locked in her. The problem which she faces is : "Whether to bear with Ignorance and Death' Or hew the ways of Immortality." Even King Aswapathy, in Mr. A. B. Purani's words, is "the aspiring human soul down the milleniums of evolution in his search for the truth of himself, of the himself of the world and of God." Thus Aswapathy is the Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress, a Homo Sapien after countless ages of evolution, striving for "an epic climb of teh human soul in its journey from the incoscient to the very gates of teh Superconscient." In the words of Dr. Iyengar, Awaspathy is 'both hiumself and the world' seeking his own salvation as well as of teh whole humanity. He aspires for himself as well as for all, for a universal realization and new creation. Starting aas a mental being he wings higher and higher will his soul attains release from his earlier bonds and is in a condition to receive Divine knowledge :

Thus came his soul's release from Ignorance,
 His mind and body's first spiritual change,
 A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,
 A new world-knowledge broadened from within.

As he receive the Secret Knowledge, "the human mould breaks, he is clothed with new raiment, and acquires new eyes, new ears; he sees the cosmic drama of involution and evolution, the lila of God descending into clay and clay aspiring to godhead; and the mystery of world-existence is a mystery no more". (Dr. Iyengar, Indian Writting in English, p. 195). Having attained a complete spiritual traansformation through the Divine Knowledge, Aswapathy projects himself as King or representative man, and makes a new ascent as the pioneer Traveller of the Worlds, the leader and pathfinder of the race.

On the spiritual plane Savitri is the Mother Earth, the Divine Mother, who wages a battle against Death for the safety of man, of Satyavan, the symbol of Truth. This Divine Mother on the material side is a wife, a young somen, fighting for the life and safety of her husband. To quote and conclude with the observations of Professor Raymond Frank Piper :

Savitri' is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful, and perfect cosmic poem

ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkens and struggles, to the highest realms of supermental spiritual existence and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence, and metaphorical brilliance."

Savitri is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute.

The Purpose of 'Savitri'

Savitri is the modern Ramayana not of one Rama but of every human soul. It is no mere epic, but a great yogic sadhana. It cannot be tied down to one form, one structure, or one purpose. It is a myriad-minded mystery of a master mind with manifold purposes. According to Mrs. Prema Nanda Kumar, in writing this colossal poem, Sri Aurobindo had a five-fold aim. In the first place he wished to write a modern epic of vast amplitude and sweep. In the second place he wished to write a poem that would at the same time be also a Manual of Yoga, embodying stairs and spirals of spiritual aspiration, involving trials and struggle, doubts and difficulties, but culminating in the summits and high-mountain lakes of spiritual victory and realisation; the poem was thus to comprise both the toil and the reward, the human effort to transcend humanity and the final blissful realisation, the manifestation of the Divine. In the third place, Savitri was to be a Comic epic, its human action, symbolising the cosmic action, the visible terrestrial drama symbolising the cosmic drama of the Lila or ecstatic play of the Lord; this really meant translating into poetic terms the massive dialectic of the Life Divine. In the fourth place, Sri Aurobindo wished to make Savitri a foretaste of the 'Future Poetry' the poetry that crystallises at auspicious moments into the mantra. Finally he wished to reproduce in Savitri something of the Valmikan, Upanishadic and Kalidasian verse-movement; in other words to evolve a blank verse movement that would strive to combine a Sanskrit clarity and purity with a Vedic manifoldness in meaning. It was to be a legend and a symbol, an experiment and an experience, a poetic philosophy and a 'Yoga Manual'.

Savitri and Other Epics

A comparison of Savitri with the other great epics of the world, at once brings out its originality and greatness. Dante's Divine Comedy promises divine bliss for the particular human soul in some far off remote region, the Heaven, and earth is condemned to remain a vale of tears. Milton's Paradise Lost, fails in its purpose of "justifying the ways of God to Man", because the inspiration of Puritanic Christianity was not sufficient for the task. Savitri is an epic of hope and fulfilment in this world, the hope of establishing Divine life on earth. Ramayana, Mahabharata and Savitri are expressions of the Indian spirit in poetry separated by a period of over two thousand years. In the Ramayana there is the exaltation and aesthetic presentation of the moral ideal culminating in the victory of Rama over Ravana, or of the divine in man over the Rakshas.

6.4 The Text

It was the hour before the Gods awoke.

Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world.
A power of fallen boundless self awake
Between the first and the last Nothingness,
Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,
Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth
And the tardy process of mortality
And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought.
As in a dark beginning of all things,
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown
Repeating for ever the unconscious act,
Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.
Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,
Its formless stupor without mind or life,
A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,
Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.
The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.

Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.
A throe that came and left a quivering trace,
Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,
At peace in its subconscious moonless cave
To raise its head and look for absent light,
Straining closed eyes of vanished memory,
Like one who searches for a bygone self
And only meets the corpse of his desire.
It was as though even in this Nought's profound,
Even in this ultimate dissolution's core,
There lurked an unremembering entity,
Survivor of a slain and buried past
Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
Reviving in another frustrate world.
An unshaped consciousness desired light
And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.
As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek
Reminded of the endless need in things
The heedless Mother of the universe,
An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast.
Insensibly somewhere a breach began:
A long lone line of hesitating hue
Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart
Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep.

Arrived from the other side of boundlessness
An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps;
A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun,
It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,
The torpor of a sick and weary world,
To seek for a spirit sole and desolate
Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss.
Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.
A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,
A sense was born within the darkness' depths,
A memory quivered in the heart of Time
As if a soul long dead were moved to live:
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more.
All can be done if the god-touch is there.
A hope stole in that hardly dared to be
Amid the Night's forlorn indifference.
As if solicited in an alien world
With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,
Orphaned and driven out to seek a home,
An errant marvel with no place to live,
Into a far-off nook of heaven there came

A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal.
The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
That glowed along a fading moment's brink,
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.
One lucent corner windowing hidden things
Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.
The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god.
Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the flame.
The brief perpetual sign recurred above.
A glamour from unreached transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.
An instant's visitor the godhead shone.
On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood
And bent over earth's pondering forehead curve.
Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss
In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic sense,
It wrote the lines of a significant myth

Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,
A brilliant code penned with the sky for page.
Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;
A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.
Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;
Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;
A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.
Ambassadors twixt eternity and change,
The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths
That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars
And saw the spaces ready for her feet.
Once she half looked behind for her veiled sun,
Then, thoughtful, went to her immortal work.
Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close:
The waking ear of Nature heard her steps
And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,
And, scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile
Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.
All grew a consecration and a rite.
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.
Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,

Here where one knows not even the step in front
And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
On this anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Impartial witness of our joy and bale,
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray.
Here too the vision and prophetic gleam
Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes;
Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.
A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
The worship of a Presence and a Power
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
Only a little the god-light can stay:
Spiritual beauty illumining human sight
Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask
And squanders eternity on a beat of Time.
As when a soul draws near the sill of birth,
Adjoining mortal time to Timelessness,
A spark of deity lost in Matter's crypt
Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,
That transitory glow of magic fire
So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.
The message ceased and waned the messenger.
The single Call, the unaccompanied Power,
Drew back into some far-off secret world
The hue and marvel of the supernal beam:

She looked no more on our mortality.
The excess of beauty natural to god-kind
Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;
Too mystic-real for space-tenancy
Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:
The rarity and wonder lived no more.
There was the common light of earthly day.
Affranchised from the respite of fatigue
Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
Pursued the cycles of her blinded quest.
All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,
And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
Alone who stares at the future's covered face,
Man lifted up the burden of his fate.
And Savitri too awoke among these tribes
That hastened to join the brilliant Summoner's chant
And, lured by the beauty of the apparent ways,
Acclaimed their portion of ephemeral joy.
Akin to the eternity whence she came,
No part she took in this small happiness;
A mighty stranger in the human field,
The embodied Guest within made no response.
The call that wakes the leap of human mind,
Its chequered eager motion of pursuit,
Its fluttering-hued illusion of desire,
Visited her heart like a sweet alien note.

Time's message of brief light was not for her.
In her there was the anguish of the gods
Imprisoned in our transient human mould,
The deathless conquered by the death of things.
A vaster Nature's joy had once been hers,
But long could keep not its gold heavenly hue
Or stand upon this brittle earthly base.
A narrow movement on Time's deep abysm,
Life's fragile littleness denied the power,
The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss
She had brought with her into the human form,
The calm delight that weds one soul to all,
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy.
Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears
Rejected the undying rapture's boon:
Offered to the daughter of infinity
Her passion-flower of love and doom she gave.
In vain now seemed the splendid sacrifice.
A prodigal of her rich divinity,
Her self and all she was she had lent to men,
Hoping her greater being to implant
And in their body's lives acclimatise
That heaven might native grow on mortal soil.
Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:
It fears the pure divine intolerance
Of that assault of ether and of fire;
It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,

Almost with hate repels the light it brings;
It trembles at its naked power of Truth
And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice.
Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law,
It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers:
Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence
It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;
It meets the sons of God with death and pain.
A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,
Their sun-thoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds,
Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,
The cross their payment for the crown they gave,
Only they leave behind a splendid Name.
A fire has come and touched men's hearts and gone;
A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.
Too unlike the world she came to help and save,
Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast
And from its dim chasms welled a dire return,
A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall.
To live with grief, to confront death on her road,—
The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.
Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,
Awaiting her ordeal's hour abode,
Outcast from her inborn felicity,
Accepting life's obscure terrestrial robe,
Hiding herself even from those she loved,
The godhead greater by a human fate.
A dark foreknowledge separated her

From all of whom she was the star and stay;
Too great to impart the peril and the pain,
In her torn depths she kept the grief to come.
As one who watching over men left blind
Takes up the load of an unwitting race,
Harbouring a foe whom with her heart she must feed,
Unknown her act, unknown the doom she faced,
Unhelped she must foresee and dread and dare.
The long-foreknown and fatal morn was here
Bringing a noon that seemed like every noon.
For Nature walks upon her mighty way
Unheeding when she breaks a soul, a life;
Leaving her slain behind she travels on:
Man only marks and God's all-seeing eyes.
Even in this moment of her soul's despair,
In its grim rendezvous with death and fear,
No cry broke from her lips, no call for aid;
She told the secret of her woe to none:
Calm was her face and courage kept her mute.
Yet only her outward self suffered and strove;
Even her humanity was half divine:
Her spirit opened to the Spirit in all,
Her nature felt all Nature as its own.
Apart, living within, all lives she bore;
Aloof, she carried in herself the world:
Her dread was one with the great cosmic dread,
Her strength was founded on the cosmic might;
The universal Mother's love was hers.

Against the evil at life's afflicted roots,
Her own calamity its private sign,
Of her pangs she made a mystic poignant sword.
A solitary mind, a world-wide heart,
To the lone Immortal's unshared work she rose.
At first life grieved not in her burdened breast:
On the lap of earth's original somnolence
Inert, released into forgetfulness,
Prone it reposed, unconscious on mind's verge,
Obtuse and tranquil like the stone and star.
In a deep cleft of silence twixt two realms
She lay remote from grief, unsawn by care,
Nothing recalling of the sorrow here.
Then a slow faint remembrance shadowlike moved,
And sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom
And recognised the close and lingering ache,
Deep, quiet, old, made natural to its place,
But knew not why it was there nor whence it came.
The Power that kindles mind was still withdrawn:
Heavy, unwilling were life's servitors
Like workers with no wages of delight;
Sullen, the torch of sense refused to burn;
The unassisted brain found not its past.
Only a vague earth-nature held the frame.
But now she stirred, her life shared the cosmic load.
At the summons of her body's voiceless call
Her strong far-winged spirit travelled back,
Back to the yoke of ignorance and fate,

Back to the labour and stress of mortal days,
Lighting a pathway through strange symbol dreams
Across the ebbing of the seas of sleep.
Her house of Nature felt an unseen sway,
Illumined swiftly were life's darkened rooms,
And memory's casements opened on the hours
And the tired feet of thought approached her doors.
All came back to her: Earth and Love and Doom,
The ancient disputants, encircled her
Like giant figures wrestling in the night:
The godheads from the dim Inconscient born
Awoke to struggle and the pang divine,
And in the shadow of her flaming heart,
At the sombre centre of the dire debate,
A guardian of the unconsolated abyss
Inheriting the long agony of the globe,
A stone-still figure of high and godlike Pain
Stared into Space with fixed regardless eyes
That saw grief's timeless depths but not life's goal.
Afflicted by his harsh divinity,
Bound to his throne, he waited unappeased
The daily oblation of her unwept tears.
All the fierce question of man's hours relived.
The sacrifice of suffering and desire
Earth offers to the immortal Ecstasy
Began again beneath the eternal Hand.
Awake she endured the moments' serried march
And looked on this green smiling dangerous world,

And heard the ignorant cry of living things.
Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene
Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate.
Immobile in herself, she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die.

6.4.1 Detailed Critical Summary

It is well-known that *Savitri* is a mystic poem. It is highly symbolic. The result is that it is very difficult to understand. It requires painstaking efforts on the part of the reader to grasp the cosmic truths contained in it. Canto I is regarded as the most difficult of all the 49 cantos. It is so because in it the psychic, the mystic and spiritual elements predominate. When it was published in 1946, it carried the sub-title “*A legend and a symbol*”, but when the full poem was published the sub-title was dropped. In the full poem, Canto I has been entitled “*The Symbol Dawn*”. This is done deliberately. The reader has to keep in mind the legendary story and its symbolic significance. It is well-known that Savitri is the story of the devoted wife who fought heroically against Death to save the life of her husband, Satyavan. When this story is interpreted symbolically, we come across of its having layer within layer of meaning.

Canto I opens with the symbol Night which figures in the beginning of the universe. It is the Night of Nescience, a limitless, inert black nothingness, a fathomless, immobile, opaque zero. It was the hour before the gods were awake, a time before Time was born. Thus Dawn is symbolic. At the surface level, it may stand for the physical dawn, the passage from night to day, from darkness to light. It also symbolizes the Night that envelops before the birth of cosmos. The divine event is dawn. It is symbolic of the light of consciousness from a state of total unconsciousness, the recurrent evolution of the cosmos out of chaos and the aspiration for the spiritual in the mind of man. Similarly, Night symbolizes a state of total absence of consciousness, not mere ignorance, but a state even prior to Ignorance. This is the symbol Night of Savitri a condition of manifold darkness in which nothing had yet emerged not even the world of matter. The cosmos was still in its womb. Only the Dark Lady of the all pervading Night, lay stretched immobile upon silence marge in the unlit temple of eternity. Yet, this featureless nightmare of a Night permeated by the Divine presence, itself is a fallen power of the boundless, infinite self above. It is the huge foreboding mind of the Night that obstructs the unfolding of the Light; it stretches opaque and inert across the path of the divine event, the birth of the Dawn. As a result, birth and the endless process of mortality remain a mystery left unstated by the vacant Nought. Even the sub conscient mind of this Night is unwilling to accept the phenomenon of birth, and feels an utter stranger of everything related to the dawn. It would rather move and sink and get absorbed in yet another Nothingness than to be born into an upward movement towards the Light. Though a power of the supreme self, being fallen and far removed from its source, the Night is incredibly incapable of taking up the task of undertaking the return journey,

cannot even conceive of it, cannot recall any association with the original self. The earth was like a dark shadow rotating swiftly through empty space without soul or consciousness. It is only the Transcendent who is Omniscient and Omnipotent and permeates the mindless, lightless universe of Darkness that can help it to recover its forgotten and submerged nativity, and seek for the absent light. Then creation took place. The nameless stirring provoked the Inconscient mind of Night to wake.

As a result of this striving in the depths of Nescience, the material universe brought numberless galaxies, and the countless stars, the Earth, the sun, and Moon and the very space and Time into existence. And with these, simultaneously the cosmos was awakened to her own subconscious mind, to the distant memory of something within her that wished to be but knew not how to manifest. She is awakened to the subconscious memory within herself for a long forgotten survivor of a deep buried past, the presence of a neglected traveller of light. In other words, this entity was vague, unconscious urge for self-awareness, lying hidden in the mind of Night, from a past which was dead and gone. The stirring and the yearning of the unnamable entity within compel the cosmos to renew her efforts of self realization in the changed set-up. When the vast Night almost consented to the birth of dawn she felt compelled to fulfil her role of the mother by being reminded of endless need in things. With this consent, there breaks out in the womb of cosmos the first ray of light, that of life consciousness, and with it the promise of a perfect awakening of the Dawn. It seemed as if the sun had sent a scout to find out the state of things in the material universe. There is now a more distinct call to the adventure of consciousness, and of life. Thought and memory play a kind of hide and seek, sleep and night and inconscience still resist resolute change. But nothing can delay the divine event and all can be done if the God-touch is there.

It is the persistent thrill of this transfiguring touch of the superconscient from above that persuades the inert black quietude of Night to manifest beauty and wonder of which it seemed quite incapable. In fact with the constant and persistent stirring from within there was all along one bright corner through which one could have a look at things, hidden and mysterious, as if through a window, from where a constant stream of light went on acting upon the impenetrable darkness of the Night. And it is the double action of this constant inflow of Light from above and the inner urge from below that ultimately, forced the world's blind immensity to sight. The darkness fell off as does a cloak from the body of a god. Uptil now Night was wrapped in the cloak of darkness, now that cloak was taken off and the beautiful body of a god was discovered.

It is all like the manifestation of the Divine Himself. A meeting of Heaven and Earth has taken place, and all it enacted as a consecration and a rite appropriate to a marriage, followed by a priestly hymn and a prayer from the earth. As soon as prostrate earth has received the awakening ray, Dawn, the bright, dazzling form of the goddess of Eternal light felt that she was not yet wanted here on earth. The vision disappeared and could not longer be seen by human eyes. It went away, but it left behind traces of its visit in the form of hidden longing for worship of the divine. Presently, men, beasts, birds, all visible earth, begin a new day's life. The glory of

the Dawn gives place to the common light of earthly day. Leader of earth's evolving destiny, man accepted the duties and responsibilities which fate placed upon his shoulders. The slow and difficult task of preparing humanity to look on the supernal beauty natural to god-kind is thus left for earth and Time to accomplish and to the intervention of the Divine Grace. Savitri, as presented in the poem, is the incarnation of the goddess Dawn, of the Universal Mother, of the Goddess of Eternal light, and for her the dawn is descent from her higher divine consciousness to the level of human consciousness, and also awareness of the necessity to confront time and Fate and reverse the Doom of Man.

Having presented the glorious drama of the dawn of light and consciousness, the poet introduces us to Savitri in her secluded and beautiful nature-surroundings. Along with the rest of God's creatures, she also awakens on this beautiful day when Satyavan must die. Though she lives among men, she is aloof, apart, a majestic being, a part of nature herself. She is like a stranger who stands apart and does not participate in the ordinary, commonplace joys of mankind. The work of transforming the ignorant earth nature begins with the advent of the Goddess Dawn and the appearance of the Mother Divine upon the earth scene. After their withdrawal from the surface, there remains only the common light of earthly day and the slow process of earth's evolution. The birth of Savitri suggests the continuity of the work launched by the earliest dawn.

Earth is the appointed field for human growth and evolution. But in this growth and evolution, it encounters the opposing forces of pleasure and pain, success and failure, because it is ruled by Ignorance. Because of its Ignorance, Man rejected the boon and bliss and undying pleasures offered to him by such messengers of the divine as Savitri. Sorrow and suffering is the lot of mankind. The life on earth which is sensuous and sensuous is short-lived like a flower. Savitri came on the earth to make human lot more happy and free from pain. She was willing to sacrifice every thing for this sake. But now she realized that such sacrifice was useless for fallen human nature was not inclined to tolerate the action of divinity on it. She was prodigal in giving out her divine qualities of universal love and sympathy but soon she realized the futility of her efforts. She realized that human nature can not be transformed. Earth nature signifies the impurity and coarsenes of man. The impurities of mortal nature on earth make it afraid of the purity of the Divine. The mortal nature expresses intolerance of a happiness free from sorrow and does not favourably accept the divine light. It fears the advent of truth that would dissolve its falsehood. It also feels insecure before the great power and sweetness of the Absolute voice i.e., the voice of God. Human nature is ignorant and fearful. It applies earthly laws to heavenly things. It runs away from the divine that seeks to uplift it. As a result, death and suffering are the lots of human beings. The great people who are born to save mankind from these sufferings pass this world with dazzling brightness and rapidity. They illuminate the world with their noble thoughts. But their efforts are defeated by the ignorance of the people of the world. Such great people are insulted. Instead of the crown, they are given the cross. But after their death their deeds for the uplifting man are remembered and they are honoured. In this way, they become immortal. Great people like Savitri are considered to be

a burden on this earth. So they have to suffer and die. This suffering was also to be the lot of Savitri. She had to endure sorrow and suffering, sickness and death during her earthly existence. Though Savitri was divine, yet during her earthly existence she had to accept the limitations of human nature, and suffer like others on this earth.

Savitri, being divine lived apart and aloof from others. She did not share with anyone her secret. She did not live for herself but for all. She hid her sorrow. Thus her personal suffering symbolizes the suffering of the world at large. Her own dread of death and her own anguish was a symbol of the cosmic fear of death and cosmic suffering. Through her own brave encounter with Death, she was determined to solve the cosmic problem. Thus Savitri's fear and problem are universalized. Her strength and determination were not merely human. They were derived from '*cosmic might*', the might of the supreme who rules the cosmos. She loved all equally well, like the universal Mother. The calamity in the form of Satyavan's death was soon to overtake her. Her individual suffering strengthened her determination to fight Death, the universal enemy of mankind. Thus her individual suffering became the sword with which she was determined to fight Death and defeat this cosmic dread.

Savitri had foreknowledge of calamity which would soon overtake her. But she was determined to fight out the great Enemy of mankind. In spite of being divine, she remained aloof. At first, she was not conscious of the pain and anguish which were her lot as human being. But very soon, she became aware of a pain which persisted and which concerned her own lot very closely. The pain was of such long-standing that it seemed to be the very part and parcel of her being. She was reminded of her own ignorance as a human being. She remembered the sorrow and suffering of her earthly existence. Consciousness gradually dawned upon her. When Savitri's consciousness was fully stirred and she became aware of the problem in the Cosmos awaiting solution, Earth, Love and Death revealed themselves to her in their pressing urgency. What is the aim of earthy existence? What is the power of Love? Is Death or Doom inevitable or can it be conquered by the power of love? Human Destiny is pre-determined. Can it be altered by human effort? Such were the problems that troubled Savitri, and now she remembered them.

Suddenly, Savitri came to know the central problem of man regarding earth, love and doom. Earth stands for the matter which masks the Infinite and which seems as original Nescience. It contains within it the upward drive and the downward drag of the evolutionary movement that has created the universe. Love represents in its essence the Divine grace that sacrifices its perfection to save creation from the prison of Inconscience. Love is the immortal element in mortals. It retains its original divine glow even when it manifests itself in human form. Doom is the apparent determinism of Nature trying to perpetuate the rule of ignorance in mankind. Its chief support is self-love in human being, desire is one of its props. These conflicting forces give rise to pain and suffering which is the lot of man. Savitri's soul was in the grip of problems of love, death and earth and she constantly pondered over them. As Savitri woke from her sleep she was conscious of the psychological struggle within her. It was this inner

conflict which tore her soul to pieces and caused her infinite pain.

Dissatisfied with the unexpressed grief Savitri had in her breast, pain still lay in wait for the appeasement of its hunger. She could not weep. Love and Death were having a fierce debate in her soul. It is the intense desire of life to break free from the dark prison of Matter and evolve to higher and higher planes till it becomes one with the divine. This divine ecstasy is present in the hearts of all human beings. But it is externalized through the actions of certain heroic souls, like Savitri. Earth advances on the road of spiritual evolution mainly when the efforts are made by some enlightened individuals. Such souls are ready to offer the sacrifice of pain and grief in the quest of this aspiration. The world is full of temptations. It comes in the way of the suffering essential for the evolution of life to higher planes. Ordinary human beings are ignorant. They do not believe in the fact that oneness with the divine is possible only through suffering.

Savitri determined to confront time and fate. She decided to overrule the Nature's law. She prepared herself mentally to struggle with Time and Fate and save Satyavan from Doom. Thus she decided to show the world that human Destiny can be changed. She was calm and determined. She collected all her spiritual resources for the grim struggle that lay before her. In Savitri the Divine has lit the limitless Flame, and it is her role today to match her will against the iron law and stay the ruthless wheels of Doom.

6.4.2 Glossary

Immobile	-	without any movement, as if it were dead
Marge	-	margin, border
Absym	-	bottomless deep gulf
Tenebrous	-	dark
Tardy	-	slow
Vacant Naught	-	a state of absolute nothingness
Semblance	-	likeness
Cosmic drowse	-	universal sleep
Somanambulist	-	sleeping, and so automatic, mechanical
Athwart	-	across
Stupor	-	sleep, trance
Inscrutable	-	mysterious, impenetrable
Inconscient	-	absolute unconsciousness
Throe	-	acute pain, as in child-brith

Lurked	-	was hidden
Clutched	-	caught hold of, gripped.
Somber	-	dark
Rim	-	edge
Mindless universe	-	universe still in a state of absolute unconsciousness.
Reluctant hush was	-	universal silence or cosmic drowse which unwilling to wake into life.
Unsounded	-	unfathomed, unmeasured
Quivered	-	stirred, vibrated.
Oblivion	-	darkness, utter forgetfulness
God-touch	-	divine help
the inert	-	in deep sleep, as if lifeless.
Black quietude	-	Night lying quiet and still in its cosmic drowse.
Opalescent hinge	-	the hinge seemed to be made of changing colours.
Ajar	-	wide open
Lucent	-	bright
Pallied rift	-	a small pale opening
Trickle	-	thin flow of light
Iridescent	-	ablaze with the changing colours, beautiful as those of the rainbow, expressive of the wonder and glory of the unseen.
Godhead	-	Goddess
Recondite	-	difficult to understand
Hieroglyphs	-	sacred writings, symbols or pictures
Code	-	mystic writing
Vacant vasts	-	the vast void, dark and dense
Far Beautitudes	-	some far off blessed place

Warp	-	surround
Fated	-	pre-determined; destined
Veiled sun brightness	-	the sun was still not shining in its full as it was early in the morning the time even before dawn, the <i>Brahambela</i> .
Imperishable	-	the immortal goddess
Precarious	-	insecure
Crypt	-	vault
Adjoining	-	linking up
Expunged	-	Struck out, ceased
Affranchised	-	freed from
Unvarying	-	usual
Leader	-	man, for he represents the highest form of life achieved so far
Acclaimed	-	enjoyed
Ephemeral joy	-	transitory joy
The embodied Guest within	-	the divinity within her
Chequered	-	ever-changing
Earth's grain	-	fallen human nature
Abysms laws	-	earthly laws
Sullies	-	disgraces
Traversing	-	passing across
Cross	-	suffering the martyrdom
Welled	-	sprang, leapt up
Dire	-	horrible, extremely cruel
The star and stay	-	the guide and the pillar or source of strength
Unwitting	-	unknowing
As on who watching . . .	-	the metaphor is taken from a race or

an unwitting race	Competition in running.
Dread and dare	- she must face boldly the dreaded ordeal that was in store for her
Rendezvous	- encounter
Prone	- lying flat
Obstuse	- insensitive
Life's servitors	- the forces and agents that serve life i.e. the senses
Ebbing	- flowing back
Oblation	- offering
Relived	- was enacted again in the soul of Savitri
Serried march	- onward movement through suffering
Immobile in herself	- calm and determined ; not at all agitated.

6.4.3 *Savitri* as a Legend and Symbol

The sub-title of epic *Savitri* as “a legend and a symbol” is quite appropriate, because it is the symbolic treatment of the well known legendary story of *Savitri* and *Satyavan*. This legend is quite popular in the Hindu households. In literature, it covers seven cantos in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. It is narrated by *Rishi Markendeya* to *Yudhishtira* to convince him of the power of wifely chastity and love.

The *Mahabharata* legend runs as follows. *Aswapathy*, the king of *Madra*, was childless. He did *tapas*, observed fasts and performed a hundred thousand sacrifices. After his *tap* of eighteen years, Goddess *Savitri* was pleased and blessed him with a daughter. In due course of time *Aswapathy* got a daughter. Since she was born as a boon from Goddess *Savitri* he named her ‘*Savitri*’. She was born as a boon from Goddess *Savitri* he named her ‘*Savitri*’ goddess. When she came of age, princes were afraid of her beauty and virtue and were not willing to marry her. *Aswapathy* was pained at this and he asked her to round the country and choose her own husband. She went on such an errand along with an old minister and after two years’ travelling was able to detect *Satyavan*, son of King *Daymatsen* who was living in a hermitage in the forest because his enemies had taken possession of his kingdom.

Since *Satyavan* was brave, intelligent, generous, forgiving, *Savitri*’s parents approved of her choice for *Satyavan* as her husband. But *Narad* did not like it, because he, being the knower of the past, present and future, knew that *Satyavan* was fated to die after one year. Even in the face of this prophecy, *Savitri* persisted in her choice, saying that one chooses a husband once only. The parents consented to her choice and she was accordingly married to

Satyavan.

Immediately after marriage she led a simple and hard life full of austerities at the hermitage where Satyavan lived. On the fateful morning when Satyavan wanted to go to the forest to cut wood, Savitri insisted on going with him, and was allowed to go on her persistent requests. In the forest, after cutting some wood, Satyavan complained of a severe headache and Savitri offered her lap for him to rest his head. Soon Satyavan died and Savitri saw Yama, the Lord of Death. Yama took Satyavan's soul in his possession. But Savitri followed him and the soul of Satyavan separated from his physical body and tied to the nose of Yama.

On the way to the realm of Death, Savitri talked to Yama and tried to persuade him to release the soul of Satyavan and spare his life. Yama at first asked Savitri to retrace her steps and perform her husband's funeral rites. But she replied that wherever her husband went or was taken, there she must go. As she had already walked seven paces with Rama, she could claim the privilege of friendly talk with him. Of the four stages (ashrams) of human life, Savitri and Satyavan had been leading the second (of married life). Her argument was that Yama, who is also Dharma, should permit Savitri and Satyavan to continue their Dharma (the grihastha Ashrama) and not separate them.

Yama was pleased with her sweet persuasive talk and asked her to demand a boon except Satyavan's life. Savitri asked for the restoration of the eyesight of her father-in-law, and this was granted. But she kept on following and pleading. So Yama granted her a second boon and then a third one. First she desired that her father-in-law may regain his kingdom, and her father, Aswapathy may have a hundred sons of his own. Asked now to return, Savitri replied that her place was with her husband wherever he happened to be. She talked so sweetly that she invoked the grant of a fourth boon. She demanded, "May a hundred sons be born to me and Satyavan," and Yama granted it and then begged her to return. But she followed him still, and spoke more sweetly and wisely than ever before, praising the efficacy of the good and the righteous. Yama was much pleased and granted her a final boon. Savitri told him naively that unless Satyavan's life was restored, the earlier boon of a hundred sons to them will be incapable of accomplishment. Yama was much pleased and granted her a final boon. Savitri told him naively that unless Satyavan's life was restored, the earlier boon of a hundred sons to them will be incapable of accomplishment. Yama too realised that she was right. As he was also Dharma, he could not go back on his words. He released Satyavan's life, blessed her heartily, and disappeared in a flame. Savitri hurriedly returned to the place in the forest where her husband's listless body lay.

She lifted Satyavan's head and placed it on her bosom. Satyavan came to life and looked at her with lingering affection. They got up and moved towards the hermitage. As it was dark, it was somewhat difficult to trace the way back to the cottage : Savitri saw a withered, burnt tree still showing flickers of flame as the wind blew upon it : she therefore lighted some fagots, and since Satyavan was still weary they could spend the night in the forest, and when the woods shall be visible in the morning, they would start for the hermitage. But Satyavan assured her that he was alright and besides his parents would be anxious. Thinking

of his parents Satyavan wept bitterly.

When at last they reached the hermitage, they found that Yama's first boon had already brought about the restoration of Dayumatsen's eyesight. In order to, explain the miracle, Savitri disclosed the truth-Narad muni's prophecy, her vow, her accompanying Satyavan to the forest, Yama's appearance there and the five boons granted by him.

Next morning even as the hermits were talking to Dayumatsen about Savitri, there came to the hermitage some people with the news that the usurper had been jailed by his ministers, his troops had dispersed, and the people wanted their beloved king back in their midst. Thus Yama's second boon was fulfilled. The people were glad to see their king hale and hearty and endowed with sight. Dayumatsen, his Queen, his son and daughter-in-law marched towards the kingdom in a chariot. The other boons were also fulfilled in due course of time : Aswapathy became the father of a hundred sons, and so, also Savitri and Satyavan.

Symbolic Treatment of it

This simple story has been transformed by the alchemy of the great rishi's genius into a living symbol, and imparted a cosmic significance. The various names have been used symbolically. Thus Savitri is not merely an accomplished princess, but a being who embodies Divine Grace, the incarnation of goddess Usha, the Mother of Eternal Light, the great World-Mother descended on earth, to work out the salvation of man, and change human destiny. She symbolises the light of Truth and wisdom, that struggles with the darkness of Ignorance symbolised by Yama, and overcomes it. Her struggle with Death for the life of Satyavan becomes symbolic of the struggle of the aspiring human soul to break the chain of determinism.

Aswapathy, the name of the father of Savitri, means the Lord of the Life, the symbol of life-energy or vital power. In the epic he symbolizes the soul of man aspiring for self-knowledge. Thus he is the aspiring human soul in search for the truth of himself, of the world and of God. He does tapas but he feels that unless the Divine Mother incarnates herself down on earth, it would not be possible to create the world of Truth here. The Supreme Mother in her infinite grace gives Aswapathy a boon that a human manifestation of her Grace would be born on earth. "A new light shall break upon the earth, a new world shall be born, things that were promised shall be fulfilled." This new light is Savitri born in answer to Aswapathy's intense aspiration for the Divine's help in creating divine perfection on the earth. "The whole period of Aswapathy's Tapas as reported in the legend has been transformed by the poet into an epic climb of the human soul in its journey from the Inconscient to the very gates of the Superconscient and the whole symbol becomes full of a tremendous cosmic significance." Aswapathy's penances symbolise the trials and tribulations of the evolving Soul of Humanity and his gains are the gains of the human race during its long struggle for attainment of the Truth. Savitri is conscious of both her divinity and humanity.

The episode of Narad's declaration of the fate of Satyavan has been raised to a very high pitch of spirituality wherein cosmic purpose and intentions, the destiny of man, are brought into play. The subtlety and cunningness shown by Yama during his argument with Savitri is

symbolise of Ignorance's trickery and device.

Satyavan is Truth and Truth cannot die. He rises from the kingdom of Death to the region of Eternity Day where the Sun of Truth never sets, where Ignorance is unknown and Death has no place. After staying in this region of Truth for some time, Savitri and Satyavan return to earth in order to accomplish their Divine Work - the creation of a new humanity. Thus Satyavan is Truth, Beauty, love and power (the power of devotion and chastity) allied to Truth can dare anything, achieve anything.

The Dawn with which Canto I of the epic begins, is symbolic of Physical light as well as of the light of creation and the light of wisdom. Similarly, Night is the darkness of chaos as well as of Ignorance.

Briefly speaking, Savitri "is like a vast band of lightning stretched into the poetic ether, illuminating the cosmos from end to end, from the deepest and the darkest Night of the Nescience to the highest heights of the transcendent Divine, revealing the double ladder of divine dynamics, the ladder of the Descent of the Divine and the ladder of Ascent of the human soul. It points to a culmination in the descent of the Divine into the earth-consciousness and the consequent transformation of the earth-nature into the divine.

1. The sub-title of the epic Savitri is "a legend and a symbol" to prove that the epic is both an epic and a symbol.
2. The legend is based on the Mahabharat story of Savitri and Satyavan. But there are a few variations too.
3. Savitri marries Satyavan : fights Death and brings back Satyavan from the realms of death.
4. Symbolically the epic manifests the victory of Life over Death of Immortality over mortality. Savitri symbolises Savitri. Divine Grace and Light : She is the incarnation of Ushatha goddess of Light ; her struggle is symbolic of the struggle of Truth and Wisdom against darkness ; Aswapathy is the symbol of life energy or vital power, the soul of man aspiring for self-knowledge. The Dawn is the symbol of physical life.

6.4.4 Mysticism In 'Savitri'

Savitri is the poetic expression of rishi Aurobindo's Divine Vision, his yogic Sadhana and his "Integral Yoga". He has endeavoured to synthesize the three trends of the most authoritative ancient philosophical systems of Vedanta : the Davita, the Advaita and the Vishisthadvaita. Hence the name of his teachings is "Integral Vedanta" or "Integral Yoga". According to his Philosophy, Brahman is ubiquitous, everything has its origin in Brahman and everything returns to Him : He is cosmos, in nature and in human being. There is no life or death, but there is transformation of soul, the aim of human being is 'Divine Life', and the way to it is through self-knowledge, and through spiritual self-perfection. The divine consciousness, according to Ghose, lies dormant in every human being which it is possible to awaken and must be awakened. This awakening in one's self of the Divine origin constitutes self-knowledge. If all the people reach that stage, they will then know God, merge with Brahman,

and “Divine Life” will defall them.

From the thematic, philosophical, purposive, descriptive and characterization points of view, Savitri is a piece of mystic poetry. Its symbolism further entitles it to mystichood. Aswapathy’s and Savitri’s yogas are Aurobindo’s as well as of every man’s and woman’s, of the whole human race. What is true of Aswapathy is also true of Sri Aurobindo to a great extent :

His is a search of darkness for the Light,
Of mortal life for immortality.

- Books I, Canto 4.

Aswapathy’s journeys in the “World-Stair” and Savitri’s entry into the “inner countries” are on the pattern of the journey of the human soul through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise in Dante’s Divine Comedy. “But whereas Dante is religious, theological and mediaeval (though modern enough for his time). Sri Aurobindo is spiritual, scientific and modern.” Sri Aurobindo has excelled Dante in one more sense. He does not catalogue sins and pigeonhole them in Hell’s circles and Purgatory’s slopes - rather he traces the lines of descent of consciousness from Spirit to Matter and the corresponding lines of ascent of consciousness from Matter to Spirit.

Reading through Savitri is journeying through the mystic occult worlds or going on ‘a cosmic conducted tour’, starting with the occult regions of Gross Matter, Subtle Matter and Material Paradise - “moving on to the realms of the Little Life inhabited by Insect, Animal and Primitive Man, and then to the Kingdom of the Morning Star peopled by rajasic heroes cast on a mighty mould - then dropping as in a downward moving “lift” into the nether worlds of the Mother of Falsehood and the Sons of Darkness, and anon, out of this dark, this gloom, this hell, along a tunnel to the bright light of the Gandharva World of the Life-Gods, and then, following a ladder of ascent, to the worlds of the Little and the Greater Mind covering the whole range from the first glimmering of thought to the highest illuminations of the intuitive mind, and winning still higher to the immaculate world of the Rose and the Flame, leading at last to the regions of sovereign Silence and of the mystic rule of the dual power of Purusha and Prakrit. Even the long Book of the “Traveller of the Worlds”, running to nearly 7500 lines, is a self-contained epic within the larger epic frame of Savitri, a poetic encyclopaedia of occult knowledge and experience.

The characters of the epic are no mere human figures but sadhaks or avatars. Aswapathy is the conscious soul of the world or of humanity or of an individual sadhak aspiring for union with the Eternal, for the removal of ignorance. Savitri as a human being is a sadhak aspiring for victory of life over death, of immortality over mortality. As a divine avatar, she is Shakti, or the Divine Mother. Satyavan too is Truth, an embodiment of truth whom ignorance and nescience in the form of Lord of Death wants to kill.

The theme of Savitri is eternity. It is man’s fundamental problem of attaining immortality or salvation. In mystical terms, the theme is

Whether to bear with Ignorance and Death
Or hew the ways of Immortality

6.4.5 Model Explanations

(1) It was the hour..... upon silence' marge

These lines are from Canto I of Sri Aurobindo's celebrated epic poem Savitri. Following the convention, Aurobindo begins his poem by introducing the crisis of the story. The poet says that it was time before the Gods awake. The Gods had not begun their work. The dawn was about to emerge. The poet calls this event as the divine event. Symbolically interpreted, the dawn means the perpetual dawn of the light of consciousness from a state of total unconsciousness. Just as dawn is symbolic, so also night is symbolic. It symbolizes a state of total absence of consciousness. The mind of night is full of forebodings. These forebodings are her memories of previous lives on earth, with all their sorrows and sufferings. Hence her mind is unwilling to accept the phenomenon of new birth. That is why her mind is pictured as obstructing the coming of the divine dawn. Night is immobile and silent. It is blind and dense. It is lying stretched across the path of the Divine event of dawn in the entire universe, which is the temple of God.

These lines remind us the similar state which is described in the Rig Veda. They bring out the nature of the crisis and its cosmic significance. The image of Night as a dark, all pervading female figure with a huge mind is apt and highly suggestive.

2. Too unlike the world..... struggle, fall.

These lines occur in Canto I of Sri Aurobindo's epic Savitri. Like the saviours, the divine, the sons of God, who are born on earth to save man and to uplift him, Savitri too was born to free mankind from the fear of death. She was entirely different from the rest of mankind, for she was the Incarnation of goddess of Eternal Light. She is like a stranger who stands apart and does not participate in the ordinary, commonplace joys of mankind. She was born on earth to help and save mankind. Mankind is ignorant. They consider great saviours like Savitri to be burden on this earth. Not only that, they also make efforts to free the earth of this burden. The result is that the great divine saviours have to suffer and die. This suffering was also to be the lot of Savitri. From the deep darkness of ignorance which envelopes Man, there sprang a very cruel return for Savitri. She too, had also to endure in full the sorrow and suffering which is the lot of all earthly existence.

The poet has described the stark reality of the existence on the earth in an effective manner. In spite of being the divine, Savitri had to remain lonely, aloof.

6.5 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have studied

1. About Sri Aurobindo's life, works and personality.
 2. about Savitri, the longest epic in English language
 3. how to assess and evaluate critically the given text.
 4. We have also made an attempt to interpret the text of Canto I critically.
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6.6 Review Questions

1. What is an epic ?
 2. Write a short note on Aurobindo's "Savitri"
 3. What do you understand by over-head poetry ?
 4. Define mysticism.
 5. Write a short note on symbolism in "Savitri".
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6.7 Bibliography

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UNIT-7

NISSIM EZEKIEL : *NIGHT OF THE SCORPION & POET, LOVER, BIRDWATCHER*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 About the Poet
- 7.3 About the Age
- 7.4 Introduction of the Text : *Night of the Scorpion*
 - 7.4.1 Detailed Explanation of the Text
 - 7.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text
 - 7.4.3 Glossary
- 7.5 Introduction of the Text : *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*
 - 7.5.1 Detailed Explanation of the Text
 - 7.5.2 Critical Analysis of the Text
 - 7.5.3 Glossary
- 7.6 Let us Sum up
- 7.7 Review Questions
- 7.8 Bibliography

7.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) know about the life and works of Nissim Ezekiel.
- (ii) understand the background of his poetry
- (iii) get an introduction to *Night of the Scorpion* and *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*.
- (iv) get detailed explanation of *Night of the Scorpion* and *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*
- (v) get critical material on both the poems.

7.1 Introduction

Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, P. Lal and Mokashi-Punekar have all blazed the new trail in modern Indian poetry in English and Made it Indian first and last. Their responses to tradition are diverse-ranging from love hate to dispossession, and from revaluation to reaffirmation. But in essence they reflect the new spirit of creative openness and expressive positivism. They easily merge with the vernacular scene and are, in fact, indistinguishable from their counterparts in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil or Telugu. Nissium Ezekiel's *Morning Prayer*; Kamala Das' *The Dance of Eunuchs* and A.K. Ramanujan's *The Striders*, illustrate the chief trends in New Indian English poetry.

These three poets wrote for themselves, in distinct aesthetic modes, not only with their individual sensibilities, but also with enough potentiality to offer significant frames for emerging talent. They show levels of definite, demonstrable achievement in a poetic milieu ridden with claims and counter-claims. Whether poets in the seventies were in any sense aware of the transcending significance of these poets is a moot point; yet as Parthasarthy has rightly noted, "each of them, by his own practice, set the pace for, and pointed the opportunities open to other poets....." and poems like *Night of the Scorpion* and *A River* by their visions of an everyday Indian reality expressed in an unobtrusive personal voice stood out in the reader's mind as signposts, indicating the directions poetry in English was likely to take in the future.

7.2 About The Poet

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004), one of the foremost Indian poets writing in English attracted considerable critical attention from scholars both in India and abroad. Not only that but also by virtue of his critical evaluation, he brought fame and recognition to a number of Indian-English poets.

This outstanding poet of post-independence India wa born in Bombay in 1924. He was a Jew by birth, but he made India his home. He was educated at Antonio D'Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay, and Birbeck College in London. He was Reader in American Literature at the University of Bombay. In 1964, he was a Visiting Professor at Leeds University; in 1974, an invitee of the US Government under its Interna tional Visitors Program; and in 1975, a cultural award visitor to Australia. His works include *A Time to Chage*, *Sixty Poems*, *The Third*, *The Unfinished Man*, *The Exact Name*, *Three Plays*, *Hymns in Darkness*, and *Poster Prayers*. He has had poems published in *Encounter*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *London Magazine*, and *The Spectator*.

Though primarily a poet, his interests were not confined to poetry alone. He was also a great critic by virtue both of the quality and quantity of his criticism. He flirted with politics in the garb of cultural freedom and was also in advertising for some time. He also tried his hand at drama and has some good plays to his credit. He frequently changed his jobs and played many roles, but primarily he was always a poet.

7.3 About The Age

Critics talk about a sense of alienation and quest for identity in Ezekiel's poetry. As he has himself said "I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider." But in the autobiographical poem, *Background, Casually* he states unequivocally that he has made his commitment and does not suffer from any identity crisis. Critics have also charged him with writing about the seamy side of Bombay-- its squalor, poverty and brutality, but the overall view of his poetry shows that whatever he writes is bathed in the genial sunshine of sympathy. Irony, yes, but not satire, cruelty and Ezekiel are absolute strangers. In his attempt to understand the predicament of man in a modern urban environment he employs two central images, the image of 'woman' and that of 'city'. The desire to come to terms with one-self inevitably brings a concord between one's inner and outer life, which becomes the very staple of his poetry.

Finally a word about Ezekiel's *Very Indian Poems in English*. Though he has been taken to task for the mocking tone that he employs in these poems, Gieve Patel ('Introduction' to *Collected Poems*, OUP, 1989) absolves him of deliberate ridicule. Patel remarks,

Friendliness redeems the '*Very Indian Poems in English*', prevents them from being unkind caricatures of people who do not know the language they use, in fact gives their language warmth.....

Friendship permeates Ezekiel's world touches poem after poem, goes about its business trying to repair creation lapses. It alleviates grotesqueries of poverty, squalor and brutishness.

7.4 Introduction to The Text

Night Of The Scorpion

The poem *Night of the Scorpion*, appeared in the collection entitled *The Exact Name*, which was published in 1965.

There is a difference of opinion amongst critics about the theme of the poem. The basic theme of the poem is that the poet's mother is stung by a scorpion and is given multiple treatment, bringing in its sweep the world of magic and superstition, science and rationality and maternal affection. The poem is the mystery of Evil and the enigma of suffering attendant upon it. The poem displays four distinct responses to the scorpion sting: (i) that of the peasants representing the traditional view, a curious mixture of metaphysics, faith, and superstition; (ii) that of the other for whom a scorpion bite is just a case of employment of experimental medicine; (iii) that of magic: the holy man performing his religious rites chanting mantras; and (iv) that of maternal love rooted in the deep biological instinct.

A significant feature of the style of this poem is its utter bareness virtually shorn of all imagery, there being just one simile and one metaphor in the whole poem. But more significant

are the symbols: the scorpion itself, the rain, and the darkness. A careful reading of the poem shows that there is a skilful juxtaposition of the symbols of light and darkness. The verse in *Night of the Scorpion* moves at a perfectly controlled pace and is faithful throughout to the rhythms of sophisticated urban middleclass speech, though its flexibility is revealed in the speech of the peasants.

Finally *Night of the Scorpion* is a poem which only an Indian English poet could have written, since the experience and the responses to it recreated here are rooted in the modern Indian situation.

7.4.1 Detailed Explanation Of The Text

Night of the Scorpion poignantly describes the selfless love of a mother who, even after suffering the pain of a scorpion bite and having narrowly escaped death, feels grateful that her children have been spared.

The poet says that he distinctly remembers the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. It had been raining incessantly for ten hours and excessive rainfall forced the scorpion to take shelter under a bag of rice. All of a sudden, the scorpion stung his mother quickly and left its poison in her body. It instinctively fled the spot and went away into the rains.

Knowing of the incident, a large number of village people, mostly peasants, thronged the poet's home. They all started praying to God to spare her life. In order to stop the scorpion from moving, they searched for it with lanterns and candles. Their shadows were formed on the walls which were scorpion-like. The poet ironically suggests that human beings are more dangerous than scorpions - their shadows look like scorpions, only much bigger. After all their efforts, the evil scorpion was not to be seen anywhere. They all showed great sympathy for the mother and said that with every movement of the scorpion, the poison spread in mother's blood. It shows that the peasants were very superstitious and did not have any knowledge as to how scorpion bite can be cured. They prayed that the scorpion should not move. They wished that the mother's excruciating pain and suffering should wash away the sins of her previous birth and diminish the grievances of the next birth. The peasants believe that there is nearly as much evil in this world as there is good. The suffering of the poet's mother would destroy a part of that evil. So evil would become less and there would be more good than evil in balance. Here, the peasants raise the fundamental issue regarding the nature of reality and roles of good and evil in life.

They all prayed that the suffering caused by poison should purify her from worldly desires and ambitions. They sat around the mother with the calmness of mind that comes from knowing the nature of things and accepting whatever is destined to happen. This is the attitude which is deeply rooted in Indian ethos.

The poet's mother rolled and writhed on the floor due to unbearable pain. His father, who was a reasonable man, tried every reasonable or unreasonable remedy. Some were

good while some were harmful - paraffin was poured on her bitten toe and it was burnt. Even the holy man tried to control the poison with his magic words.

After some twenty hours, the effect of poison was minimized. On getting cured, the mother thanked God that the scorpion had stung her and her children were spared. Thus, the poem reflects the life of the simple village people, their beliefs and superstitions, their helplessness, and their surrender to the powers of nature and of God.

7.4.2 Critical Analysis Of The Text

Night of the Scorpion published in *The Exact Name*, 1965, is one of the finest poems of Nissim Ezekiel and has been universally admired, for its admirable depiction of a common Indian situation, for its vivid and forceful imagery, for its bringing together of opposites, for its ironic contrasts, and for the warmth of human love and affection. It shows that Ezekiel is a very Indian poet, rooted in the Indian soil, and acutely aware of the common human situations of day to day Indian life.

Night of the Scorpion is a brilliant narrative poem without any break or division into stanzas, except for the last three lines which stand apart. The speaker might be the poet himself or an imagined person who speaks in the first person. We are told that his mother was stung by a scorpion one rainy night. It had been raining continuously for ten hours and during this time the scorpion had been concealed behind a sack of rice, such as do provide hiding places for all sorts of vermins in a typical Indian home. But it chose to come out into the rain once again to discharge the poison in its tail. It stung his mother. 'Flash of diabolic tail in the dark room' is a symbol of evil, a powerful, vivid image of evil which lurks in dark places hidden from the eye. It does its work in a flash, and then retreats.

The mother, of course, particularly in Indian homes, is the Grah Laxmi, the beloved of all, and so all are anxious to bring her quick relief. The peasants, their neighbours, come in large numbers, and pray for her. They come like 'swarms of flies' and like flies they 'buzz' the name of God. They are simple well-meaning people, and they believe in the efficacy of prayer, that prayer can 'paralyze' or make ineffective the harm caused by the scorpion, the symbol of evil, evil incarnate. They search for the scorpion, with lanterns and candles, throwing giant scorpion like shadows on the walls. They are ignorant and superstitious people who believe that if the scorpion moved, its position would also move in the blood of the mother. But if it remains still, the poison also would not flow. So, they are eager to kill the evil one, and make hectic efforts to search it out. When they fail, "they click their tongues" in their disappointment.

They pray for the health and well-being of the mother, and Ezekiel's verse here grows incantatory and mantri in keeping with the requirements of thought and emotion. They sit around the mother, muttering their prayers, casting their spells, with "the peace of understanding", says the poet ironically, on their faces. They are wise men who know how to exercise

evil spirits and bring solace. This wisdom is reflected in the peace of their faces. Neighbours continue to pour in, rain continues unabated, there are more insects and more lanterns and candles as the mother continues to writhe and groan with pain on the mat in the centre. The sense of swift and continuous movement is conveyed by the swift pace of versification:

*More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain.
My mother twisted through and through
groaning on a mat.,*

The repetition of 'more' conveys the idea of excessive numbers.

The world of magic, superstition and irrationality and blind faith, is now juxtaposed with the world of science, rationalism and scepticism. The world of science is represented by the sceptic, rationalistic father, who, in contradiction to the holy man, tries "powder, mixture, herb and hybrid." He even pours a little paraffin upon the bitten toe, and burns it to burn out the poison, and the son watches the flame with interest. While the father tries to tame the poison in his own scientific way, the superstitious neighbours continue to chant their incantations, having full faith in their efficacy. But the irony is that both the traditional, superstitious ways, and modern scientific ways are equally futile and vain. The mother suffers intense agony for full twenty hours when the pain automatically subsides. The poison works for twenty hours, and then the agony ceases, whether it is treated or not. But we, in all our wisdom, refuse to recognise this simple truth.

The last three lines of the poem form an ironic contrast to the whole. While all the others were eager to bring relief to the suffering mother in one way or the other, the mother herself is more concerned for her children and does not think of her own self or her own suffering. She is rather glad of the fact that it was she who was the target of the evil one, and not any one of her children. It would have been a real tragedy for her, if any one of her dear ones had been stung. Thus the self-effacing love of the Indian mother has been highlighted. It is a very Indian poem dealing with a commonplace Indian situation, and radiating the warmth of human affections. Writes R. Parthasarthy, *Night of the Scorpion* evokes superstitious practices we haven't still outgrown. It enacts an impressive ritual in which the mother's reaction, towards the end, to her own suffering ironically cancels out earlier responses, both primitive and sophisticated. The inter-relationship between the domestic tragedy and the surrounding community is unobtrusively established. The poem also demonstrates the effective use of parallelism." Commenting on the brilliant performance of Ezekiel, Paul Verghese writes, "the success of the poet lies in the careful variation of rhythm which helps him to achieve different effects. The rhythms of the speaking voice shift with the sense, in a manner suitable in free verse. The change of rhythm in the following lines is intended to achieve and incantatory effect which it does:

*May he sit still, they said,
 May the sins of your previous birth
 be burned away tonight, they said,
 May your suffering decrease
 the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
 May the sum of evil
 balanced in this unreal world
 against the sum of good
 become diminished by your pain....*

The syntax and grammar of the lines in the poem are straightforward and the voice we hear is obviously the poet's own. The imagery is vivid and sensitive with more than usual clarity as in "parting with his poison-flash of diabolic tail in the dark room-he risked the rain again". 'The peasants came like swarms of flies/and buzzed the name of God a hundred times/to paralyse the Evil One', and 'With candles and with lanterns/throwing giant scorpion shadows on the sun baked walls.... they searched for him'. Throughout the poem, Ezekiel deliberately withholds his own emotional colouring so that while reading the poem we may be aware of a traditional world of superstitions as against another of scepticism and rationalism. The two attitudes are placed in juxtaposition in the passage below:

*My father, sceptic, rationalist,

 He even poured a little paraffin
 upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
 I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
 I watched the holy man perform his rites,
 to tame the poison with an incantation.*

The poet's emotional detachment lets the situation speak directly to us. The entire poem is built on irony which reaches its climax in the last lines:

*My mother only said
 Thank God the scorpion picked on me
 and spared my children.*

Cristopher Wiseman has examined its versification in some detail and noted several

innovations: “The poem demonstrates a deliberate attempt at formal innovation by using a loose, seemingly free-verse narrative structure. It is much more relaxed and open worked than Ezekiel’s formal poetry, with a new quality of natural colloquialism in diction and tone : We notice in the poem the abandonment of capitals at the start of each line, the dramatic casualness of the recalled crisis, the long paragraph set off abruptly from the three-line climax, all of which give *Night of the Scorpion* a new feel, a sense of unhurried lucid progression through time. It is an interesting and very valid poem, containing a fascinating tension between personal crisis and mocking social observation, but the discrepancies of form confuse the tone which swings between the natural and colloquial reporting of experience and more removed literary formality. And yet, for all the problems, a real voice is heard in this poem, with its own rhythms and cadences.”

7.4.3 Glossary

Lines

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|---|---|
| 5. | <i>flash</i> | : | A ‘flash’ is a sudden burst of light. Here the word is used to mean the quick or instant action of the tail (the poison is in the tail of the scorpion). |
| 6. | <i>diabolic</i> | : | of the Devil (in this line and 1.10 the poet establishes the scorpion as a symbol of Evil).

here diabolic means cruel, cunning and wicked. |
| 7. | <i>risked the rain again</i> | : | moved quickly away into the rain. This action is typical of the scorpion. It instinctively moves away quickly when it has stung some one. |
| 8. | <i>swarms</i> | : | in large numbers. |
| 9. | <i>buzzed</i> | : | made a humming sound (since in the earlier line ‘flies’ has been used ‘buzzed’ is poetically most appropriate here because flies make a buzzing sound). In the context buzzed means the sound produced when the peasants started saying the Name of God in a low voice all the the same time. |
| 10. | <i>paralyse the Evil One</i> | : | to stop the scorpion from moving. By using the capitals, the poet has established the scorpion as a symbol of evil. |

12. *giant scorpion shadows*: large shadows which had scorpion-like shapes. The poet ironically suggests that human beings are more dangerous than scorpions-- their shadows look like scorpions, only much bigger.
15. *clicked their tongues* : made short, sharp sounds with their tongues, as a gesture of sympathy for the poet's mother.
24. *this unreal world* : This refers to the basic belief common to Hindus, that the world is unreal.
- 23-26 *May the sum... by your pain*: what the peasants say is something like this: There is nearly as much evil in this world as there is good. The suffering of the poet's mother would destroy a part of that evil. So evil would become less and in balance there would be more good than evil. Thus the peasants raise fundamental questions regarding the nature of reality and roles of good and evil in life.
- 27-28 *Purify your flesh of desire*: make yourself free from desire (ref. Yeats in 'Sailing to Byzantium'. "Consume my heart away sick with desire").
- the peace of understanding* : the calmness of mind that comes from knowing the nature of things and accepting whatever is destined to happen an attitude deeply rooted in Indian ethos.
36. *sceptic* : person with a habit of mind that doubts the truth of particular beliefs or theories, a doubting Thomas.

- rationalist* : one who is guided by reason and not by blind belief.
37. *every curse and blessing* : every kind of remedy that occurred to him, some effective, others harmful.
38. *herb* : plant used in medicine.
- hybrid* : concoction of some kind: The poet deliberately uses an adjective in place of a noun (ref. Ted Hughes' 'green tigering the gold', in 'Pike' where 'tiger' has been used as a verb).
39. *paraffin* : oil obtained from petroleum.
42. *the holy man perform his rites:* the man who did some religious acts with the help of mantras.
47. *picked on me* : chose me.

7.5 Introduction Of The Text : Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

The poem *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher* appeared in *The Exact Name* which was published in 1965. The title is reminiscent of that famous line from Shakespeare, "The poet, the lover and the lunatic/Are of imagination all compact." Instead of a lunatic we have a birdwatcher here.

Like Ted Huges' 'The Thought-fox', this poem is also about the creative process. In both, the poets 'wait for words' but whereas in 'The Thought-fox', this poem mirrors the movement of the fox, at first furtive and erratic and then quick and urgent, Ezekiel in his poem stresses the value of waiting patiently whether for words, or women or birds.

7.5.1 Detailed Explanation Of The Text

At the very outset the parallel between the poet, ornithologist and lover is established. The poet waiting for words is like the ornithologist sitting in silence by the flowing river (by transferred epithet the silence has been attributed to the river) or like a lover waiting for the beloved till she 'no longer waits but risks surrendering'. Thus the bird-beloved-poem syndrome runs parallel throughout the poem. There is a realisation that the poets do not compose poems but the poems are found as an ornithologist waiting by the hillside suddenly catches a bird, or as the beloved who, when she finds she is loved, surrendered to her lover. Unless the spirit is moved neither love nor poetry is possible.

In the second stanza the exploration starts in the image of birdwatcher going in search of the rarer bird. 'Deserted lanes' and 'thorny' grounds mark the essential loneliness and hardships involved in the pursuit (of both birds and women) and thus the connection with 'the heart dark floor' is easily made, suggesting the mysterious nature of human passion. It is there, in 'the heart's dark floor', that women are something more than body-- they appear like 'myths of light', and show their spiritual aspect as well. And the poet goes in his own meandering way following the 'restless flight' of imagination until inspiration comes and poetry is born. This poetry transcends the purely physical barriers in such a way that 'the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight'.

The poem reveals Ezekiel's keen observation, modesty and objectivity of attitude, the restraint of self and allowing things to happen in order to record them. Through apt and compact images the ordinary takes on the note of the mysterious.

7.5.2 Critical Analysis Of The Text

Ezekiel had a high conception of the vocation of a poet, and in a number of poems he has expressed his views on his own art. This he has done in "Poetry" in *A Time to Change, Creation in Sixty Poems* and, *Poet, Lover and Bird-watcher* in *The Exact Name*.

Poet, Lover and Bird-watcher is one of the better known poems of Ezekiel and has received considerable critical attention. It epitomises the poet's search for a poetics, "which would help him redeem himself in his eyes and in the eyes of God." Parallelism is drawn between the poet, the lover and the bird-watcher. All the three have to wait patiently in their respective pursuits, indeed their 'waiting' is a sort of strategy, a plan of action which bears fruit if persisted in and followed with patience. It is patient waiting which crowns the efforts (strategy of waiting) of all the three with success.

Ezekiel attempts to define the poet in terms of the lover and the bird-watcher, (To force the pace and never to be still is not the way of the lover and the bird-watcher. The best poets wait for words). There is close resemblance among them in their search for love, bird and word. All the three become one in spirit, and Ezekiel expresses this in imagery noted for its precision and decorum:

The hunt is not an exercise of will

But patient love relaxing on a hill

To note the movement of a timid wing.....

There is no action, no exercise of will, in all the three cases, but 'Patient waiting' is itself a strategy, a kind of planned action to reach the goal. The patience of the bird-watcher is rewarded when the timid bird is suddenly caught in the net; the patience of the lover is rewarded, when the woman loved, risks surrendering. Similarly, if the poet waits till the moment of inspiration, he achieves some noble utterance. "Bird-beloved-poem syndrome runs throughout the lyric."

The second stanza stresses the fact that slow movement is good in all the three cases. If one wants to watch the rarer birds, one has to go to remote places just as one has to discover love in a remote place like the heart's dark floor. It is there, that women look something more than their body, and that they appear like myths of light. And the poet, in zigzag movements, yet with a sense of musical delight, manages to combine sense and sound in such a way that 'the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight'. Highest poetry is remedial in its action, it cures human apathy and deadness of spirit, activates human sense, and makes man see and hear much more than he would have otherwise done. The comparison of the 'deserted lanes' etc., to the "heart's dark floor" connects the search of the bird-watcher with that of the lover and the poet. Says Paul Verghese, "What is striking about the use of images in this poem is that the transition from one image to the other is so unobtrusive that the poet, lover and bird-watcher lose their separate identities for once and merge into one another to carry the poem forward to its end". However, the use of such vague abstractions as 'myths of light', has exposed Ezekiel to the charge of "flabby thinking" and the use of "woolly terminology" of the Indian philosophical tradition.

I.N. Kher has given a lucid and penetrating analysis of this fine poem, and one may be excused for quoting him at some length. He writes, "The poem reveals the nature of the poetic perception through the network of a highly fecund metaphor in which the images merge into each other like lovers in the act of love. The poet or the birdwatcher begins by defining the mood in which all those who study birds or women must place themselves-birds or women symbolize freedom, imagination, love and creativity. A posture of stillness is recommended, because it is in stillness that one listens to the stirrings of the soul, a necessary pre-requisite to the study of freedom and creativity. That is why the best poets always wait for words form the centre of stillness before they articulate their experience. This exercise in waiting is analogous to the patient lover's or the birdwatcher's act of 'relaxing on a hill/To note the movement of a timid one.' At the end of this 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 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 image of "thorny" ground refers to the arduous nature of the poet's mission. It is only after he has gone through this travail that he is able to see the birds or words of poetry in the form of women who "slowly turn around" not only as "flesh and bone" but also as "myths of light with darkness at the core!" The poet, then, gloats on the slow curving movements of the women, both for the sake of their sensuousness and the insights they bring. He creates his poetry out of these "myths of light" whose essential darkness or mystery remains at the centre of creation itself.

But the poet finds the greatest sense or meaning in his own creation itself. The poetry which releases the poet from suffering is the medium through which the deaf can hear and the

blind see.

The admirable lyrics is based on, “iambic pentameter lines, in two closely rhymed ten-line stanzas”, giving it a rigid structure. “This is a justly celebrated poem, containing a beautiful worked set of images moving, as the title suggests, on three interpenetrating levels. The rich quiet density of the texture is most impressive and is helped by a new, but still minor, breaking of the formal pattern. For instance, in the twenty lines we find ten run-ons-afar higher proportion than in most of the poet’s traditional poems-which allows the syntax much more scope in defining pace and emphasis, and in following emotional and intellectual rhythms in a natural way. The sentences are much longer than usual, exactly embodying the urgent but meditative movement of the experience. At the beginning of the second stanza the pentameter breaks under the poet’s visionary and metaphoric intensity. Line 1 of stanza II has five and a half feet and line 3 has six feet; the run-ons and the juxtaposition of short and long sentences provide a rhythmic tension and a sense of feeling and perception moving inevitably forward through complexity towards resolution, helped, not hampered, by the metrical pattern. The spondaic substitution of “the heart’s dark floor” draws attention to this striking central image as well as enlarges the poem’s sound properties in a powerful way. (Cristopher Wiseman)

7.5.3 Glossary

Lines

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | <i>To force the pace</i> | : | that is, to proceed in a hurried manner. |
| | <i>never to be still</i> | : | ever restless. |
| 4-6 | <i>The hunt timid wing</i> | : | pursuit of a poem or a bird or beloved should be involuntary, unhurried, waiting patiently until the quarry comes to him. |
| 6. | <i>timid wing</i> | : | an example of synecdoche, ‘wing’ standing for the bird, ‘timid’ because the slightest movement might scare the bird away. |
| 8. | <i>risks surrendering</i> | : | the beloved is willing to give herself up to her lover even though she is not quite sure of the outcome. |
| 9. | <i>moral proved</i> | : | principle is proved through practice. |
| 10. | <i>Who never moved</i> | : | no poetry is possible unless the deeper |

- recesses of the soul are stirred.
13. *Deserted lanes* : has a double meaning, literal as well as figurative. The rarer birds ought to be found where they are in no danger of being disturbed by human beings. 'Deserted lanes' figuratively suggest loneliness that is involved in the pursuit of a beloved or a poem.
- 13-14 *the rivers... the source* : A fine piece of observation. Indeed rivers flow in silence at the source. But metaphorically through this image the poet stresses the silence that is required of a birdwatcher and a lover.
- 14-15 *by a shore.... dark floor* : An unusually complicated line for an easy fluent poet like Ezekiel. 'Remote' and 'thorny' once again carry double meaning, literal and figurative. 'Remote' literally means removed from the busy haunts of men (ideal for birdwatching), figuratively it means inaccessible (referring to the dark floor of the hearts of women). Similarly 'thorny' figuratively means full of obstacles, for don't we all know how difficult it is to reach a woman's heart.
15. *heart's dark floor* : the phrase stresses the mysterious nature of human passion.
- 16-18 *And at the core* : Another obscure image. When the lover has penetrated the mysterious nature of human passion then the beloved is revealed to him not only in her physical aspect ('flesh and bone') but in a spiritual light as well. Note how the heart's dark floor is counterpointed against myths of light and even these 'myths of light' have 'darkness at the core' because if we delve deep into the souls of women we encounter deeper mystery there.

17. *myths of light* : rather an obscure image. 'Myth' actually means a traditional story of unknown authorship, serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature. But in the context it would mean something spiritual as opposed to the physical 'flesh and bone'.
- 18-19. *sense flight* : the poet goes about in his own zigzag way following the restless flight of imagination until inspiration ('sense is found') comes and poetry is born.
19. *crooked* : zigzag
20. *The deaf sight* : Pursued with sincerity poetry is truly transcendental. It transcends the physical barriers, attains remedial heights. purely

7.7 Let Us Sum Up

Night of the Scorpion presents a typical Indian situation involving an entire community in a domestic tragedy. Superstitious practices and rituals are enacted to drive away the evil spirit. At the same time, the poem reminds us that, in the face of misfortune, man is alone and helpless.

Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher epitomises the poet's search for a poetics, 'which would help him redeem himself in his eyes and in the eyes of God.' Parallelism is drawn between the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher. All the three have to wait patiently in their respective pursuits.

7.8 Review Questions

1. With suitable illustrations from the poem discuss the theme of the 'Night of the Scorpion'.
2. In what sense is the style of the poem bare, unadorned? Pick out the images in the poem *Night of the Scorpion* similes and metaphors-- and symbols and then write at least two pages on them.
3. Take a close look at the diction and the rhythm of the poem *Night of the Scorpion*. Give examples from the poem to show that the diction catches the sophisticated urban middle-class speech. Quote lines from the poem to show the difference between this speech and the speech of the peasants. Also show how the poet achieves a controlled rhythm through a fine fusion of nasal/m,n,n/, lateral/l/, plosive/p,b,t,d,k,g/ and fricative

/s, r, z/ sounds, through the skilful interplay of short and long vowels, and through repetition.

4. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem *Night of the Scorpion*.
5. The birth of a poem is an abstract idea. Ezekiel conveys this idea through concrete images. Elucidate.
6. Examine the diction and the rhythm of the poem *Poet, Lover Birdwatcher*. Do you find any essential difference between the diction of this poem and that of 'Night of the Scorpion'? The poem has a slow unhurried movement suited to its basic theme. How does the poet achieve this rhythmic movement?
7. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher.'
8. Why do you think the mother was bitten by the scorpion?
9. Why is the tail of the scorpion called 'diabolic'?
10. The poet compares the peasants to 'swarms of flies'. Why?
11. What do the peasants pray for?
13. What is meant by 'the peace of understanding on each face'?
14. 'I watched the flame feeding on my mother.' What does this line make you feel?
15. What do the last two lines tell you about the mother?
16. With suitable illustrations from the poem bring out the parallels between the poet, lover and birdwatcher.

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UNIT-8

KAMALA DAS : *THE SUNSHINE CAT & THE LOOKING GLASS*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Kamala Das Life and Works
- 8.3 Kamala Das: An Autobiographical Poet
- 8.4 Introduction To Poems
 - 8.4.1 *The Sunshine Cat*
 - 8.4.2 *The Looking Glass*
- 8.5 Love Poetry of Kamala Das
- 8.6 Other Major Themes of Kamala Das' poetry
- 8.7 Language and Other Poetic Devices
- 8.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.9 Review Questions
- 8.10 Bibliography

8.0 Objectives

The present unit aims at exploring the depth of contemporary Indian writing in English specially with reference to the poetry of Kamala Das. To appreciate her feminine sensibility and her diversity of moods in given socio-cultural situations and use of the English language, we must read her poems which is a frank, bold and powerful expression of her experiences as a woman.

8.1 Introduction

Mrs Kamala Das, whose maiden name was Madavi Kutty, was born at Punnayukulam in Malabar in Kerala in 1934. Her parents were poets. Much of her education was done at home. It seems that her grand mother loved her a great deal. Married at the early age of fifteen, she has three daughters now and is settled in Bombay. Her married life has not happy; she wants love and fulfillment which she has not found. This has led to frustration and personal disillusionment. Her martial relationship has been hollow, but she has not been able to break it.

Though her husband allows her complete freedom, she craves for love not freedom. Thus there is an element of personal touch in her poems. She is one of the foremost poets in Indo-Englan tradition. *My Story* (1974) is her autobiography. Her poetic works are: *Summer in Calcutta*, (1965), *The Descendants*, (1967), and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973). Her contributions are very much to journals and magazines. She has written essays and stories. She is the recipient of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her stories in Malayalam. She has given the Poetry Award of the Asian PEN Anthology in 1964.

8.2 Life and Works of Kamala Das

Recognized as one of India's foremost poets, Kamala Das was born on 31st March 1934 in South Malabar in Kerala. Her mother, Balamaniamma, is a renowned Malayalam poetess. She started writing at an early age under the influence of her great uncle Nakapat Narayan Menon, a prominent writer. As a child she remembers him writing from morning till night and thus leading a blissful life. Das was also affected by the poetry of her mother, Nalapat Balamani Amma and the sacred writings kept by the matriarchal community of Nayars. She was privately educated until the age of 15 when she was married to K. Madhava Das. She was sixteen when her first son was born and she herself admits that she "was mature enough to be a mother only when my third child was born." Her husband, K. Madhava Das, played a fatherly role for both Kamala and her sons because of the great age difference between the husband and the wife. He often encouraged her to associate with the people of her own age. She acknowledges that he was "very understanding."

When Kamala Das wished to begin writing, her husband supported her decision and it was basically meant to augment the family's income. Being preoccupied with a lot of domestic duties she could not keep her schedule enjoyed by her uncle to "work from morning till night." She would wait until nightfall when her family had gone to sleep and would continue writing until morning. She writes, "There was only the kitchen table where I would sit and cut vegetables, and after all the plates and things were cleared, I would sit there and start typing." This tough routine took its toll upon her health, but she viewed her illness optimistically as it gave her more time to stay at home and thus more time to write. Her career progressed steadily and her husband remained all the while her greatest supporter. Kamala Das' poetry, which was charged by an unusual frankness and openness about sex and her unabashed autobiography, invited a lot of controversy but her husband as she confesses was very "proud of her." Though he was sick for three years before he died, his presence brought her tremendous joy and comfort. She stated, "there shall be not another person so proud of me and my achievements." She is a bilingual writer and writes in both the language with equal felicity.

Kamala Das' achievements are in diverse fields, which extend well beyond poetry. She has dabbled in painting, fiction and even politics. Though she failed to win a place in Parliament in 1984, she has been much more successful recently as a syndicate columnist. She has partly moved away from poetry because she claims that "Poetry does not sell in this country" but fortunately her forthright columns do. Das' columns assertively warn on everything

from woman's issues and childcare to politics.

True to her words that "I wanted to fill my life with as many experiences as I can manage to garner because I do not believe that one can be born again" in December 1999 Kamala Das got converted to Islam – something which created a furore in the press and Indian society at large. Her name was changed to Kamala Surayya and announced her plans to register her political party "Lok Seva."

Das being a bilingual writer has published many novels and short stories in English as well as in Malayalam under the name "Madavi Kutty". Some of her works in English include the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), a collection of short stories called *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992), a few of her stories, originally written in Malayalam, are published in *Modern Indian Short Stories: An Anthology* (1974), and *My Story* (1975), an autobiography.

8.3 Kamala Das: An Autobiographical Poet

In the Preface, Kamala Das explains why she decides to write her autobiography:

"*My Story* is my autobiography which I began writing during my first serious bout with heart disease. The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of sudden death... Between short hours of sleep induced by the drugs given to me by the nurses, I wrote continually, not merely to honour my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscious."

Das' autobiography, that is a fragmented and not in chronological order, is typically all about her domestic life. Describing her relation with her parents, her husband and her lover etc., she asserts her subjective power in a traditional patriarchal society and destabilizes the given notions of what is a female or feminine and dislocates some of Indian cultural and social relations. Her life and writing display the anger, rage, and rebellion of woman struggling in a society of male prerogatives. The chapters are short, that is about three to four pages, but they assertively offer distinct pictures or themes like the dowry system, bride-burning, male abuse, the ban against divorce, woman's isolation, job discrimination, female infanticide, poorly paid or unpaid female labour, high female illiteracy and a series of such social horrors. Besides, Das autobiography specifies the connection between personal/sexual and social / political struggles for a female protagonist in this traditional male-dominated society. Briefly, it becomes a story of "a colonized childhood, resonant with later theme of oppressed womanhood." Das similarly showed the characteristic alienation of being suspended between indigenous and colonized cultures. In its doubleness of commercial and spiritual intentions provided a valuable recording of the hybridized, "impure" cultural conditions in which post-colonial English-language writers in India find themselves. Kamala Das stands between two contradictory positions: First, the exceptional woman in conflict with her traditional society, struggling for a status specifically endowed through her writing, and second, the most exceptional of Indian women, the Krishna

devotee, who chose to get converted to Islam. Shirley Geok-lin Lim sees Das' autobiography "as a critique of the victimization of women in a patriarchal society" in which "sexuality not only makes her vulnerable physically but also makes her vulnerable emotionally and spiritually. This autobiography confirms that she "saves her life by telling her life." Lim very rightly asserts that Kamala Das "chooses writing against suicide, self-inscription against self-destruction and so takes steps of revolt against a symbolic/political system that has oppressed her." *My Story* gives insights, which contribute significantly in understanding and appreciating the whole of Das' writings including her poetry.

She is an author of over 30 novels in Malayalam that has given her a permanent place in modern Malayalam literature. Some of her more recent novels in Malayalam include *Palayan* (1990), *Neypayasam* (1991), and *Dayarikkurippukal* (1992). She is currently the author of a syndicated column in India.

In addition to six books of poetry, which include *The Sirens* (1964) for which she won Asian Poetry Prize, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) which got her Kent Award, *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), and *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996), a collection of poetry is brought out with Prithvi Nandi. Her poetry again is an exercise in autobiography.

As a poet Kamala Das is known for a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context and an overpowering urgency so far as her need for love is concerned. R.Parthasarathy says that her poems "literally boil over," as for instance, *The Old Playhouse*, *Looking-glass* and *The Freaks*.

If on the one hand controversy swirled around her sexually charged poetry, on the other her uncanny honesty and despair is equally infectious. One of her most impressive qualities is to remain entirely true to a certain point of view. Despite the fleshy titles of the collections of her poetry, they create the impression of a genuine core of pain by which one is moved rather than shocked. Its effect is enhanced by the fact that it is controlled, brief and even delicately humorous.

If one surveys briefly the contents of her poetry one notices that there are two characteristic features: (a) she is very much herself in her poetry and (b) her tone is distinctly feminine. It is so because she writes incessantly about those issues which are close to her heart, for instance she writes about the need for love or failure of love, her unhappy personal life or her unsuccessful sexual encounters and relationships. Her reminiscences of childhood at Nalapat House, her family home are tinged with nostalgia as in *My Grandmother's House*. However, her fifty poems in *Summer in Calcutta* and the twenty-nine in *The descendants* are almost without exception about love. While focusing very minutely on her poetic output, one notices that in the former collection there are two poems *The Flag* and *Sepia* which attempt to express social awareness and the latter contains two poems about her sons. Likewise, *The Old Playhouse* a volume of thirty-three poems in all contains half the poems from the two earlier books, and some of which are from *Opinion*, a small magazine that used to publish

poetry.

Moreover, the poetry of Kamala Das has the confessional quality, which makes one recall in some ways Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath who attempt to work out their trauma in poetry. While the poems of Anne Sexton read like “a bad case of melancholy,” the poems of Sylvia Plath are, to use the words of Robert Lowell from the Preface to *Ariel*. “the autobiography of a fever.” The work of both the poets reveal in their poetry the traumas in relation to their parents, especially their fathers, in the case of Kamala Das, it is often the husband who is at the core of her disturbed state of mind. There is no escape from conflict, from a sense of futility and strange sense of meaninglessness. Therefore, they cannot find fulfillment as women and the poet sees in their lives “a vacant ecstasy” of the eunuchs – a devastating image of their own sterility – as in “The Dance of Eunuchs.” Das adopts some stylistic devices to demonstrate these emotional vacancies like frequent repetition of words, phrases, lines and even sections of a poem. She may not always use them with skill but she manages to convey the futility of her attempts to disguise the emptiness of her life. Despite this weakness for the pointless repetition, there is an urgent driving rhythm, and conversational idiom

8.4 Introduction to The Poems

8.4.1 *The Sunshine Cat*

This poem, too, like the previous ones, finds a birth in Summer in Calcutta (1965). It is sans warmth, sans love. Sexual humiliation, which forms the main theme of Kamala Das’s autobiography, *My Story*, is the central experience herein. It recounts the tale of a woman too much wronged by the male world around her.

The poem directly highlights the miseries of a forlorn woman. The man treated her very badly, - the man she loved did not reciprocate her feelings and he was basically ‘selfish’ and ‘coward’; the husband, who neither ‘loved’ her nor ‘used’ her, but who was ‘a ruthless watcher’, was also made of the same grain; the ‘band of cynics’ she ultimately turned to for her emotional gratification was all selfish and egotistic. These cynics with monkey like hair on their chests subjected her to all kinds of humiliation and torture, including physical and odorous; their smells were sickening and they were mostly driven to her for quenching their raging lusts. All of them assured her to be ‘kind’ towards her, but they also pointed out to her that she was not meant for love, suggesting thereby that she was probably frigid and cold and ill-suited for love making. When she got out of their clutches, she retired to her room, to her soft bed, and started sobbing and weeping. She now realized that ‘tears’ were her trusted companions and she would have to pass the rest of her life in a sad, hopeless manner. At this moment, when she needed the love and consolation of her husband, he treated her with cruelty. He use to lock her up, every morning, in a room of books with a streak of sunlight lying near the door, before he went out for his official duty. Soon winter came and while locking her one day he realized that this woman was a mere skeleton, a hair-thin line, and no human creature of flesh and blood. By the time he returned to her in the evening, she was ‘cold’ and ‘half dead’, quite unfit for the

touch of a man. The disease hinted here is that of serious nervous breakdown, to recover from which Kamala Das had to go to her Grandmother's house.

The situation of her utter loneliness and frustration with no one to counsel or guide her, has been beautifully portrayed in the present poem. She has not received love from her licit or illicit orbits; she is totally lonely and frustrated. Those who claimed to be kind towards her had only subjected her to humiliation and injury. Her husband has been no better to her. He rather uses his matrimonial prerogative and shuts her in the reading room. She, is thus, completely isolated, and the only companion for her is the 'sunshine'. She is no better than 'the sunshine cat', all pale and diseased. That is why the title of the poem is suitably chosen to be *The Sunshine Cat*. The title is suggestive enough; it rather works as a symbol for her total isolation in the midst of material comforts. 'Cat' may also signify 'the healthy and exuberant sexuality with which we normally associate this animal'. Taken in this light, the poetess's life over brimming with sexuality finds no true source for fulfillment, and it, therefore becomes all the more miserable and deplorable. The last lines in particular and the tenor and temper of the whole poem in general verify this fact – 'now of no use at all to men'.

And then, the poem is pervaded with the air of lust and passion. It has no place for pure and true love. The poetess might feel the hunger for the ideal lover, but she cannot be freed of the sin of committing adultery with other man, and she seems to cry over the loss of her 'use' for men in general. The modern woman's predicament is energetically voiced in this poem, but her challenge of the socio-moral laws, nay her flaunting of them, is unpardonable. In most of the poems of Kamala Das, the reader is forced to believe that she has written them for sensational effects, but a healthy literature makes him wiser, healthier and happier. Put to this test, the poem fails to satisfy us, and the poet also falls flat without any hope of redemption.

There are certain felicitous expressions in the poem, and the poet is at her best there. Because what we should expect of the poet is her capability of springing surprises through visual, arresting expressions rather than the profundity of thought in her. One such impressive expression is the 'Men's chest, where new hair sprouted like great-winged Moths'. It is decidedly born of her close observation of the male chests. Another remarkable expression is 'I shall build wall with tears', and this 'wall' will effectively 'shut me in'. A third expression of impressive visual imagery is 'A yellow cat'. Was it not T.S. Eliot who had beautifully used the 'cat' image in the beginning of his immortal song, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"? In its effectiveness and impressiveness the 'yellow cat' of Kamala Das comes very close to that of Eliot rubbing its nose against the foggy window panes.

A ruthless watcher – a merciless observer (i.e. the husband).

The band of cynics – the group of crazy people.

Sprouted – shot forth, put forth.

Burrowing – hiding, concealing.

Pegs of sanity – drinks of rationality (i.e. so far she was a sensible woman).

A streak of sunshine – a ray of the shining sun.

8.4.2 *The Looking Glass*

This poem is also culled from *The Descendants* (1967). Like ‘Ferns’ and ‘Convicts’ in this volume, it is about physical love between a man and a woman. It is ‘both patronizing and indulgent in tone’. The woman in it is every woman that seeks love, and the man is every man that wants a woman to satisfy his sex-hunger. The poem faithfully reflects the mutual need of man and woman for physical enjoyment, and a woman must be truthful to this need of hers.

According to the poetess, a woman should be honest about her wants and requirements, and then it would be easy for her get a man to love her. For physical gratification, she should draw close to him. She should not hesitate to stand naked before the looking-glass with him so that he sees it clearly that he is stronger and she is weaker, younger and lovelier. This will satisfy his male ego and excite his passion for the weaker sex. She should also accept his praise of her beauty and youth. In order to satisfy his male ego, she should point out to him that he is bodily perfect, and notice that his eyes getting red in passionate excitement. She should also mark his shy walk across the bathroom floor, covering himself in the towel, and his jerky way of urination. She should, in short, admire him for all his good points and let him feel that he is her ‘only man’ for sexual satisfaction.

As a woman true to her nature, she should give herself over to him totally. She should offer to him the scent of her long hair, the musk of her breasts, and the warm shock of her menstrual blood. She should allow him to have his fill of sexual pleasure and indulge in it with all her ‘endless female hungers’. He would then feel that she is not only satisfying his lust, but also hers.

Again the poetess returns to the initial impulse in the poem, and asserts that it is easy to get a man to love a woman, but that it is very difficult to carry on her life after he has gone away forever. For him, it is simply a sexual encounter with a lustful woman, but for her it entails all difficulties and tensions. On his desertion, she feels totally stranded in life, suffering humiliations and miseries of a forlorn woman. She was once in quest of emotional fulfillment, but she received only tears and sobs, in coming into contact with ‘strangers’. Her body, which once gleamed under his touch like burnished brass, becomes now ‘drab and destitute’. She is no more than a melancholy woman having onslaughts of disease and decay and deformity.

Speaking of this poem M.L. Sharma writes as follows: “In this poem, the poet offers a cool, almost a cold blooded, dispassionate and clinical analysis of the different stages of falling in love, the Machiavellian strategies to hold that love and the inevitable decline and fall of the heart’s empire. The title of the poem could better have been ‘Loves’ Progress’”. And further: “I find that the poem partakes of the mature attitude of W.B. Yeats, when he was at one in love, to be passionately gripped by its storms, and out of it to take a cool clinical stock

of the whole situation. The poem does not merely celebrate the passions of love; it simultaneously views the climax and the anti-climax through a bifocal vision which renders the complexity, ambivalence and the irony of the total situation in a much greater depth than is normally available to the Newtonian 'Single Vision', to adopt a Blakean phrase".

The poem is simple and straight forward in its diction. It is highly charged with pulse and power. Passion seems to leap out of every line. A sharp feminine sensibility is at work here. As a full-blooded woman, Kamala Das makes an honest confession of her wants for her sexual gratification. The poem is decidedly a psychic striptease. It powerfully evokes the image of a lustful relationship between the two sexes. Nothing is, in truth, concealed from the reader, not even the ugly and the forbidden. There is a subtle psychological analysis of the male mentality in the first part of the poem, just as the second part is totally pervaded by a feminine consciousness. The cumulative effect of the poem is one of sterility and futility of sexual love.

Admit your Admiration – the woman should accept her man's praise of her beauty and youth.

Eyes reddening under shower – it is a beautiful image indeed, and suggests sexual consummation. (Mark the word 'shower' in this context).

Fond – tender, sweet.

The musk – the scent obtained from the gland of musk-deer.

A living without life – a life without true love.

Gleamed – shone slightly or momentarily.

Burnished – polished; made bright by rubbing.

Now drab and destitute – now dull and miserable.

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried

Beneath a man?.....

The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.

When you leave, I drive my blue battered car

Along the bluer sea. I run up the forty

Noisy steps to knock at another door.

Most of the experiences, which we come across in her poems, are of an unkind variety and her search for love and kindness ends up in a barren wasteland, where there is neither life nor hope.

Whatever experiences she records in her poems are full of intimation of isolation and

turbulence and not of tranquility. This sense of hopelessness and betrayal prompts her to become a rebel and she looks upon all her relations with contempt and disgust as she says “.... Marriage meant nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours.” She had dreams of a loving husband who could provide her the bliss of a paradise. Instead she feels as she conveys in “The Invitation”:

Her alienation from her husband, because of the type of experience she had from him, was but natural for her to have no softer emotions for this relationship. O.J. Thomas quotes in his article “Kamala Das: A Search for Home, Companionship and Love,” published in *The Quest* (Vol. V, June 1991) extensively from her disillusioning experiences in her marriage where she confesses that she remained a virgin for fortnight after marriage while he was after some other lady. It is, therefore, clear that she feels crazy, unhappy and even hungry in the absence of true love in her life as she puts in her poem “The Freak”:

“.... Who can
Help us who have lived so long,
And have failed in love? The heart,
An empty cistern waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling stakes of silence....
I am a freak.”

Her poems, which frankly depict sex and sexuality, remain a part of the discovery of self; it is the sterile aspect of it – the absence of love and its deprivation by the society, the relations and by the cultural traditions and customs – which finds a variety of expression. On the one hand, she unknowingly shook the norms of a male dominated society and on the other

8.5 Love Poetry of Kamala Das

Kamala Das knows for certain that “I have a life/ To be lived.” Therefore whatever the existence may be under the burden of sickening experiences in this crude world, in which even love is a hollow word, “all of /Me is ablaze with life.” Living is possible only through all absorbing love. In his book, *Two decades of Indian Poetry* (1980), Keki Daruwalla rightly says, “Kamala Das is pre-eminently a poet of love and pain, one stalking the other through a near neurotic world. There is an all-pervasive sense of hurt though. Love, the lazy animal hungers of all flesh, hurt and humiliation are the warp and woof of her fabric. She seldom ventures outside this personal world.”

Search for love is the principal preoccupation of Kamala Das’s poetry. She confesses with utmost candour that she began writing “poetry with the ignoble aim of wooing a man.” As a result, love becomes a pervasive theme and it is defined by the unconditional honesty and it is through love that she endeavours to discover herself. It was in no way an easy journey to

discover the self but a poet like Kamala Das shook all the accepted norms of stable male-oriented society and frankly spoke about her sex life as to her a restrained love is no love at all. The things, which are discarded as dirty, and taboos are the very things the integral part of the total structure of love and even life. Only a total immersion in love, which includes the “fond details” of the basic urges of man and woman, do justice to this experience. A critic has aptly stated that “like the creator of ancient Tantric art, Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of human form; her work seems to celebrate its joyous potential while acknowledging its concurrent dangers.” In fact she goes diving deep into her own self, unravelling mysteries which were never known to Indian women, and more honestly speaking, none dared to unravel them in the past. Had she lived only half a century ago and written such poems, they would have been burnt down. Bruce King is right when he writes in *Modern Poetry in English* (1987):

“Das’s themes go beyond *stereotyped* longings and complaints. Even her feelings of loneliness and disappointments are part of a longer than life personality obsessive in its awareness of itself, yet creating a drama of selfhood.”

Consequently, her poems are autobiographical which show that love, sex, marriage and companionship are important themes to her. On her own self-discovery she expresses the different layers of hypocrisy. She is bitterly criticized for that by the high priests of morality. In this context Hari Mohan Prasad and Chandra Prasad state in their edited volume *Indian Poetry in English*:

“Her poetry has often been considered as a gimmick in sex or striptease in words, an over exposer of body or ‘snippets trivia.’ But the truth is that her poetry is an autobiography, an articulate voice of her ethnic identity, her Dravidian culture.... ‘A poet’s raw material,’ she says, is not stone or clay; it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment.”

Kamala Das lends a new dimension to her love poetry by revealing her kinship with the Indian tradition, which has its roots in Indian epics, and the Western tradition that related her to the Confessional poets. As she is concerned with various facets of love, her love poetry can be divided into two phases: In the first phase, her obsessive involvement with physical love is prominent, in the second, her drift towards ideal love can be clearly discerned. By ideal love she means a kind of love that exists between Radha and Krishna, which does not check her impulse to freedom.

In search of love she does not contrive a fictional world of her own. Instead she looks to herself and into herself. Her body is the greatest centre of curiosity, the “curiosity shop.” At the same time it is the most intimate and sensitive instrument to judge and evaluate the world. She collects through the heaps of its responses and experiences and chronicles them in her own non-conformist, unhackneyed way.

All along the history, these things were projected from male point of view but Kamala

Das presents them from the sturdy female vision that presses hard the reader to recognize the present day reality.

In her poetry, the body with its numerous sensitive centres all over records the contents of her daily routines and lived experiences and traps all sensations, all changes, all joys and all sorrows. It responds to all “stabs” that love can offer:

I enter other's
Lives, and
Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home.
Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man?.....
The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.
When you leave, I drive my blue battered car
Along the bluer sea. I run up the forty
Noisy steps to knock at another door.

Most of the experiences, which we come across in her poems, are of an unkind variety and her search for love and kindness ends up in a barren wasteland, where there is neither life nor hope.

Whatever experiences she records in her poems are full of intimation of isolation and turbulence and not of tranquility. This sense of hopelessness and betrayal prompts her to become a rebel and she looks upon all her relations with contempt and disgust as she says “.... Marriage meant nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours.” She had dreams of a loving husband who could provide her the bliss of a paradise. Instead she feels as she conveys in “The Invitation”:

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I am a freak.”

Her poems, which frankly depict sex and sexuality, remain a part of the discovery of self; it is the sterile aspect of it – the absence of love and its deprivation by the society, the relations and by the cultural traditions and customs – which finds a variety of expression. On the one hand, she unknowingly shook the norms of a male dominated society and on the other Das gave an understanding of the feminine psychology and its needs that man is just not capable of love or understanding. She managed to create poems with the help of two different sets of diction, which reveal the different worlds of men and women along with their cultural paraphernalia.

Kamala Das’s poetry has achieved a certain degree of distinction in modern Indian poetry in English by the stunning frankness in ever line she writes and in making public a vast fund of agonies and information regarding woman’s psychic experience that lay hidden in the in the private female world. On this account she has become a poet who has shocked the reader by her unbridled expression given to those taboos and urges which could never be associated with the so called decent female society as for, example, to talk of “the musk of sweat between breasts the warm shock of menstrual blood.” Her obsessive concern with the physical love seems to be her main preoccupation as in the opening lines from *The Looking-Glass*:

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier.... Admit your
Admiration.

However, it should not obscure the value of the second kind of love poetry, that is, the poetry of the ideal love. For instance consider her poem *The Old Playhouse* where her concept of ideal love is embedded:

“... Love is Narcissus at the waters’ edge, haunted
By its own lovely face, and yet it must seek at last

An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors

To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

By using the narcissistic image she points out the lovers remain involved in their own egos which prevents them from becoming one; they continue to be self-indulgent. However, it is not a permanent situation and the lovers transgress the boundaries. In Kamala Das's poetry the element of devotion or Bhakti is absent. She surmises herself as Radha who goes in search of Krishna, the ideal lover. She confesses in *My Story*:

“I was looking for an ideal lover. I was looking for the one
who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha.”

This mode of poetry suits her temperament and intensity of her experiences. It stands in conformity with the confessional tradition and her poetry, which is essentially autobiographical, acquires a kind of authenticity.

Away from the world of philanderers and its futile exercises, she turns to the mythical world of Krishna and Vrindavan. It fills her with the promise of seeking the lasting love and gives her the freedom from the rigid social order. In Das's poetry the haunting image of Krishna with “myriad shapes” becomes inseparable from her poetic consciousness. Among her Krishna poems consider *Ghanshyam* which depicts vividly the transformation that was wrought in her by her relentless search for love. In another poem *Radha* she presents the ecstasy that Radha experiences in Krishna's embrace.

Radha does not snap her marital ties in spite of her love for Krishna as she considers her corporeal form insignificant. Precisely Krishna has a therapeutic role to play in the poet's life. Like Sarojini Naidu, Das also thinks of Krishna as the central principle of the universe, but unlike the former she offers the Lord her body also. She says, “In many shapes shall I surrender... I shall be fondled by Him.” As Fritz Blackwell rightly observes in his article “Krishna Motifs in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das,” which appeared in *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 13, 1-4 (1977-78), that Das's “concern is literary and existential, not religious; she is using a religious concept for a literary motif and metaphor.”

Das's love poetry stands apart as it beautifully blends the indigenous traditions with the confessional tradition of the West. Love finds a vigorous manifestation in her poetry and becomes its all-pervasive spirit. A.N.Dwivedi observes in his article: “As a Poet of Love and Sex” That “Mrs Das offers us a feast of vivid images of love couched in felicitous language. No doubt, love is her ‘forte’ on poetry.”

8.6 Other Major Themes in Kamala Das's Poetry

Kamala Das is one of the most aggressively individualistic poets writing in India today. She has poetry in her blood; both her mother and grandfather being established poets in Malayalam. The world of her poems is charged with two characteristics: her Indianness and

her feminine sensibility. Writing about *My Story* Iqbal Kaur says:

“Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can refuse and reject the victim positions, that they can frustrate the sexist culture’s effort to exploit, passivise and marginalize women.”

Her main concern happens to be suffering and humiliation meted out to man and woman, especially her sympathy for the suffering of

“... The field hands
Returning home with baskets on their heads,
.....
..... their thin legs crushing
The heads, the shrubs, their ankles
Bruised by
Thorns, their insides bruised by memories.....”

A Hot Noon in Malabar also portrays the vagrant, deprived people like “beggars with whining voices” the Kuravan and Kurathis, the scheduled castes in Kerala who earn their living by reading palms of people, and the bangle sellers moving from door to door:

“... all covered with the dust of roads
for all of them whose feet devouring rough
miles cracks on heels so that when they
clambered up our porch, the noise was grating.”

Das’s poems like *Nani*, *Other*, and *Honour* which is a powerful expression of uncontrolled anger and righteous indignation at the cruelties that have been heaped upon the depressed people by the feudal society are ironic and sarcastic. The poet as in the following lines presents the sufferings and dishonour, to which these people are subjected:

Today they laugh at laws that punished no
rich , only the poor
Were ravished, strangled, drowned buried at mid-night
Behind snakeshrines
Cheated of their land, their huts and hearts....

The atrocities against the lower class and the poor people, the poet is in a dilemma

being herself of the class of the oppressor. In “The House Builder” the poet sympathetically portrays the sufferings of the poor hired labourers from Andhra Pradesh who have migrated to urban centres like Bombay for employment opportunities. It is an ironic poem which offers a contrast between “mercy times” and the “miserable life” of “These /Men who crawl up the clogged scaffolding / Building houses for the alien rich.” The images like “cicadas in brambled foliage” words like “harsh,” “burden” and “withered boughs” emphasize the sufferings of the hired labourers. The poet identifies herself with these dark souls singing in order to hide their misery. She refers to these “Builders in Bombay” in *My Story* also.

To the poet, the plight of the inmates in the lunatic asylum is equally pathetic as in the poem *Lunatic Asylum*. In one of her early poems Das warns the reader not to pity these hapless souls:

.... No
Do not pity them, they
Were brave enough to escape , to
Step out of the
Brute regimentals of
Sane routine, ignoring the bungles, the wall
Of Wens....

She wishes to project the dehumanizing effect of social injustices and inequalities. Her Colombo Poems mark the widening of the poet’s concern from caste oppression specific to Indian society to racial oppression outside India. These poems present the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka and the situation of pain suffering, distress prevailing in the island, which she visited in 1984. These poems are a testimony to her involvement in the fate of a people with whom she is racially related. With these poems the poet covers all forms of oppression, which the human beings undergo on account of racial prejudices, cultural and linguistic chauvinism. On these issues she also saves her position by writing on the edge. Consequently, she does not rise to the level of “conscious raising” as other Third World women writers like Ismat Chughtai and Mahasweta Devi could do.

Kamala Das has never been tired of identifying herself to the cause of women. Her views can be categorized as “a gut response,” a reaction that, like her poetry is unfettered by other’s notions of right and wrong. She has ventured into the areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her fellow citizens. Here she transcends the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. In her poems she reacts to the conservative way of life, which prefers to suppress what is unpleasant and “unexposable.” She appeals to her fellow women in “Advice to Fellow –Swimmers” to break the shell and should no more be passive; they should assert their individual identity putting an end to constant suffering and humiliations in a society known for its patriarchal design. If her poem *My Son’s*

Teachers is noted for suffering through death on “a grey pavement/Five miles from here,” *Middle Age* deals with life of humiliation and suffering for no fault except being on the

“wrong side of forties.” The lines like:

“.... They no longer
Need you except for serving tea and for
Pressing
Clothes.”

hint at the problem of modern households where the grey haired are mercilessly banished from the families. Das’s attempt in this poem is to prepare the dreamy middle aged mother to face the ultimate reality shedding the mental torture that has been in store for them:

You have lived
In a dream world all your life, it’s time to
Wake up, Mother,
You are no longer young you know.

She painfully notices the change that has come over the domestic culture. *In My Grandmother’s House* she says:

I who have lost
My way and beg now at stranger’s doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

Kamala Das conceives an image of woman as a victim. In this sense she has been to transform her personal, intense experience into a general truth. As a result she succeeds in communicating to her readers her mental suffering. In *The Sunshine Cat* Das speaks of the injustice meted out to women; she believes that the society is hostile and humiliates her in every possible way. She says in the opening lines of the poem:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man
She loved, who love her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where
New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, borrowing her
Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget.

To forget oh, to forget....

She seems to lose her sanity when forced to go to the bed against her desire; to escape from suffering and humiliation all she can do is “to build a wall with tears.” Actually, Indian women are often a puppet in the hands of dominating men; they are ill-treated and humiliated till the men realize that they are of no use to them any more and then they are discarded as “half-dead” creatures. She has arrived at a conclusion after an uncanny exploration of womanhood and her needs and desires that instead of considering the body as a source of pleasures it should be considered as “a familiar pest” that is a troublesome and destructive thing. A woman wishes to be treated as a person, a living individual but the society is not willing to change its attitude. Das in this context is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman’s ambivalence giving expression to it more assertively and openly than any other Indian woman poet. Kamala Das writes about the suffering of women.

Das is concerned even with the lives of eunuchs who lead a life of endless suffering as in her poem *The Dance of the Eunuchs*. It is the meaningless dance in which they are engaged in despite having a barren life. Though they sing songs of celebrations even for the unborn children, they fail to produce any admiration and sympathy because of their harsh voices still they keep dancing with vacant ecstasy. According to the poet:

...They

Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from

Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness

Were in each of them.

The focus is on the sterility of their body and they survive only to suffer, humiliated and ridiculed by a hostile world. Painfully aware of the culturally defined roles of these people she only feels disturbed and discards the rude social responses. Kamala Das writes about the suffering of men, women and other living individuals of the society not only to show her concern for these deprived categories of humans but for raising a protest against their marginalization and exploitation. In this respect, the poetry of Kamala Das attains a real substantiality as it contributes for the strong reactions and justifications for the most needful awakening of woman as a living entity in being in the world.

It is appropriately stated that modern Indian English poetry with all its aggressiveness and boldness begins and culminates in Kamala Das. In fact she makes poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering over a state of existence in which a certain section of society and women conduct themselves. She tries to penetrate with her imaginative potential and sympathetically understanding of the possible average sufferings and grievances of the Indian women and the poor strata of society in the domestic circumstances as well as the work conditions in the society.

The thematic concerns in Das’s poetry range from the sad plight of woman to the

harrowing situations and a pathetic nature of human situation. The inalienable manner in which the politics of sex and other kinds of resentment make the human beings suffer arduously create a suffocatively inexpressive stance. The manner in which Das substantiates her argument has the poetic delicacy coupled with stubbornness. If her poems become an “outcries,” of the painful experiences of being a woman, what stirred her psyche most is the dehumanizing of man and the sad social situation of his or her fate.

In the poetry of Kamala Das the personal beginnings, which culminate in a note of failure and disappointment in love, advance to the ultimate realization that the human existence is not greater than that of any other creature on earth. Her major thematic concerns deal with the initial gender distinctions as well as the poignant experiences of the pathetic nature of human imperfection and creatureliness. The whole poetic vision of Kamala Das has immense authenticity and openness though, like the human nature, has its own flaw as Prof. Iyengar pointed out: “the endless reiteration of such hurt, such disillusionment, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into mannerism.” However, none can deny the human suffering and humiliation is her dominating themes and she airs her views with boldness and hopes that the society might change its attitude to those who are downtrodden.

8.7 Language and Other Poetic Devices

In her poem *An Introduction* Kamala Das offers an argument about the poetic medium. She asks her ‘friends,’ ‘critics,’ and ‘visiting cousins’:

‘Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is human as I am human, don’t
You see? And it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions it
Is human speech.

All this argument about the parameters of language suggests one significant point that any language cannot comprehend the intensity of her pain and agony. And she would like to be left alone in this matter, that is, in creating her own language. In her article “My Instinct, My Guru,” which appeared in *Indian Literature*, (Vol. 31, No.1 Jan.-Feb. 1988) she says:

“I don’t find it easy to write either in English or in Malayalam. Language has been very difficult for me Thoughts were there, but to cover them up, to

wrap them up in decent language is very difficult. I am discovering a new language; trying to make a new language, create it, which will suit me. Because I have yet to find a language that can keep pace with my thinking.”

In creating her own language, Kamala Das surpasses all the possible linguistic conventions. In effect her “All mine, mine alone” language is a violent formula of expressing the very heat and dust of her humiliation in being a sabotaged and relegated being in this world. In the face of the “designed deafness” of the society, she deeply committed to humanism. “Crowing of crows” and “roaring of lions “ are involuntary and instantaneous outcries of the occasions. Similarly, the human occasions in the volatile circumstances prompt such involuntary outcries in order to give vent to the pent-up repressed feelings and emotions. The pleasures and pains of these outcries of the occasions are inseparably involved. To convey this sort of dual experiences she uses the language of paradox and antithesis as in the lines from *An Introduction (Summer In Calcutta)* where she says “I do not know politics,” and then adds “But I know the names of those in power, and can repeat them like days of week, or names of months.” Such statements are meant to convey politics of society as well as the politics of man-woman relationship, which creates a harrowing unrest in her introspective moments. It is worth mentioning here what C. N. Srinath says about Kamala Das: “There are conspicuous craftsmanship, introspection and self-analysis in her poetry that has given it character.”

The greatest quality of her craftsmanship lies in handling language and other poetic devices which make her versification unique. Her poems, like all modern poetry are “increasingly concise” and are “moving towards metaphor” to borrow the phrase of R. Parthasarathy. The poems like “The Looking Glass” and “The Sunshine Cat” prove that Das has conveyed herself only through the metaphor. In the former poem it is the metaphor of the looking glass which conveys a twofold meaning: first, it shows the male body’s attraction and fascination for the poet even when it is linked with lust and secondly it gives an ironic suggestion to flatter the male ego, which can not be missed. Das emphasizes almost entirely on the visual as opposed to the aural elements in verse. It is pertinent to note that in her poetry the sensuous absorption of sunlight that is known as a metaphor for her fascination with life is repeatedly referred as in the following lines:

“April Sun, squeezed
Like an orange in
My glass? I sip the
Fire, I drink and drink
Again, I am drunk,
Yes, but, on the gold
Of suns.”

In her poem *The Sunshine Cat* we get the picture of a half-dead woman, of no use at all to men; The use of the metaphor of the sunshine acquires another dimension when combined with the image of cat as in the following lines:

Her husband shut her
In every morning; locked her in a room of books with a streak of sunshine
lying near the door, like
A yellow cat, to keep her company, but soon,
Winter came and one day while locking her in, he
Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a
Line, a hair-thin line, and in the evening when
He returned to take her out, she was a cold and half-dead woman.

In *The Suicide* an unhappy woman makes her appearance; she is a picture of unhappiness but enacts the role of a happy woman:

I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
Of happy woman
Happy wife.

Through her poems she reveals her feminine psychology and talks about her needs, anger, anguish and ambitions. In doing so at times she becomes dramatic and even theatrical. In situations it is her diction that moves from one register to another as per her thoughts. I.K. Sharma analyses in his article *The Irony of Sex: A Study of Kamala Das's Poetry*, "Put Together, her poetry is a dissertation and that too a well documented one." Her language is as she puts in *An Introduction*

"the speech of the mind
That is here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of blazing funeral pyre."

Das's preference for free verse may be due to her lack of competence in metrics though she employs occasionally conventional devices such as assonance, alliteration and rhyme. It makes in the free verse the phrasal syntax the rhythm-deciding factor. Das's poetry

breaks free from the rhetorical and romantic traditions as she creates the most diverse idiom as she realizes that there is no escape from conflicts of experiences while her male counterparts like Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan are struggling hard to form a dense, pithy and ironic idiom in their poems.”

Das adopts the device of repetition of the phrases not only to emphasize the existing meaning but also to convey exactly opposite in fact which, in turn, attempts to disguise the emptiness of her life. In *Substitute* she repeats the phrase “It will be all right, it will be all right” as if to convey that it is working well. *The Sunshine Cat* repeats the phrase “to forget/ To forget, oh, to forget” and “I do not love, I can not love, it is not /In my nature to love.” Or “cough, cough their lungs out” is used in *The Flag*.

In spite of this weakness of pointless repetition, Kamala Das’s poems display a strong feeling for rhythm. Depending on the situation depicted in her poems she uses language as one of her mechanisms for survival that records the intense moments of a searching individual in various roles or even of the neurotic persona who finds herself profoundly alone and longing for the cessation of conflict. Das manages to record her feelings with a quietness and controlled brevity as in *Luminol* which is one of the most moving poems of Kamala Das. Her honest confession to be a freak as in *The Freak* reveals through a simple question in every day, conversational speech:

Can this man with
Nimble fingertips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin’s lazy hungers?

Similarly, her images show the poets urge to break the fetters of feudal social orders and the brute regimentation. It is not for anything else but the extent of freedom that sea becomes a significant symbol in her poetry. In *Composition* she says that she “could hear at night /The surf breaking on the shore.” She shocks the reader with her honesty as in *Nani* – where a pregnant maid hanged herself but is totally forgotten by the grandmother who asks “who is she?” and Das says “Each/truth ends thus with a query.” As C.V.Venugopal remarks:

The poetry of Kamala Das is full of questions that are rarely answered. They are queries about truth. But, truth, in general, is unbearable. And Kamala Das, the seeker after truth feels betrayed.”

In an article “Kamala Das’s Poems: A Quest for Identity” Dr. G. Kumar observes aptly that she could attain her mission of discovering the truth through her diction. Like Ezekiel she “waits for words.”

“Kamala Das’s sine qua non, however, is her vocabulary, choice of verbs and some syntactical constructions are part of what has been termed the

Indianization of English. This accomplishment is suggestive in the growth and maturity of national literature that the writers free themselves from the linguistic standards of their colonizers and create literature based on local speech.”

She writes in *Without a Pause*:

Write without
A pause, don't search for pretty words
Dilute the truth, but write in haste, of
Everything perceived, and known and loved.

Kamala das has created a place for herself in the world of Indian Writing in English by the use of the personal voice which make her expressions strong and against the old images as in the poems *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. Her tone at times becomes hysterical but it is, to use Juliet Mitchel's words “the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism.”

Thus Kamala Das, a contemporary poet, is quite conscious of her artistic design as well as purpose and holds herself fully responsible towards her vision. She writes with a natural ease about love, sex and marriage – all within her experience and awareness. Her language and “poetic voice imbued with a feminine –cum-feminist sensibility is typically her own.”

No wonder she asserts in *An Introduction*:

I am a sinner, I am a saint.
I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not your. I too call myself I.”

And her poetry is as Davendra Kohli maintains “ in the final analysis an acknowledgement and a celebration of beauty and courage of being a woman.

8.8 Let Us Sum Up

Through this unit you have got a perception that Kamala Das is the major Indian woman poet who has rejected the conventional approach in themes and techniques of poetry.

And her poetry is as Davendra Kohli maintains “ in the final analysis an acknowledgement and a celebration of beauty and courage of being a woman.

8.9 Review Question

1. Write a short note on Das' major themes.

2. In what sense do you find her a feminine poet?
3. What are the special features of her language as used in her poetry.
4. Give a brief account of her life showing how it contributed to her personality as a poet.
6. Evaluate critically Das' concept of love.
7. Write a note on the poetic devices used by Das in her poetry.

8.10 Bibliography

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UNIT-9

MULK RAJ ANAND : *UNTOUCHABLE*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Themes of His Novels
- 9.3 A Detailed Analysis of “*Untouchable*”
- 9.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.5 Review Questions
- 9.6 Bibliography

9.0 Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to present to you a detailed analysis of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*. Besides, you shall know about Mulk Raj Anand and his contribution to the field of Indian English fiction.

9.1 Introduction

Anand began his career with *Untouchable* (1935). The novel projects Anand’s characteristic way of attacking from an existential basis the social evils affecting the behaviour of the members of the Hindu community.

Caste system, though seemingly related to the Indian milieu or the Hindu community, has a universal dimension which needs to be recognized. It is therefore surprising that barring Anand no other Indo-Anglian writer has projected it in any significant terms.’ The fact that even after the passing of the Untouchability Offences Act in 1955, the evil of untouchability still persists in the country reflects a deep-rooted prejudice which affects the human behaviour and poses an intractable problem. The novel *Untouchable* indeed offers a telling comment on what might be regarded as a running sore in the Indian body politic. It is noteworthy that the novel assumes an added significance because of its embodying the so-called colonial experience which forms the staple as it were of commonwealth literature. Its significance lies in its being involved with such questions as loss or failure of identity, rootlessness, ‘aloneness’, which constitute the major themes in modern fiction. In focusing on an existential situation wrought by discrimination and segregation Anand draws attention to an aspect of the human condition which has a tragic import since it sets at nought such liberal concepts and ideals as brotherhood of man or ‘the community of humanity’. In portraying Bakha, the protagonist of *Untouchable*,

as a 'marginal man', Anand has attempted a fictional projection that is relevant to the understanding of the predicament of contemporary man. The importance Anand attaches to this theme is further emphasized by his continued preoccupation with the problem in *The Road* and *The Big Heart*.

9.2 About the Novelist and the Themes of His Novels

Mulk Raj Anand continues to enjoy the reputation of being a stalwart in the field of Indo-Anglian fiction. The validity of this statement is borne out by the warm reception his works have received from scholars of different nations and the eagerness with which his novels have been translated into many world languages. Anand has made a significant contribution to the development of the Indo-Anglian novel which has acquired an identity of its own, as evidenced by the critical acclaim bestowed on it in recent years. One of 'the Big three' of the Indo-Anglian fiction—the other two being Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan—Mulk Raj Anand has freed the Indo-Anglian novel from the narrow confines of Romance within which it had come to be posited by its earlier exponents, although he is as much prone to romanticizing as any of them. His novels undoubtedly project a lively image of India, the details of which both reflect and imply his passionate concern with its social reality. They exemplify a realistic sensibility which is capable of plumbing the very depths of human personality and of social structure.

A multi-splendoured personality, Anand has been an art critic, educationist, social worker and pacifist without giving up his chosen vocation—that of writing—since, as he has averred, "the compulsion to write was in my case the choice between life and death."

When he faced many hardships in this field, he contemplated suicide but never thought of changing his vocation. Given to the most exacting of social hungers, Anand does not seem to have felt any guilt or anguish in his attempts to gratify them as is brought out by his own 'confessions' concerning his affairs with women and 'escapades' which seem to have egged him on in his pursuit of freedom instead of dampening his ardours. What seems to attract him is the elan vital—be it in Yasmin or Irene—which has a catalytic effect on his creative powers. Indeed, the problem of his life or that of his characters does not involve the objects of appetites but the appetites themselves which seem insatiable. It is no wonder that in his novels he is able to delineate these appetites with a remarkable exactitude which is what makes for the authenticity of the experience embodied in them. His passionate espousal of the cause of the dispossessed, the oppressed and the downtrodden has been attributed to his alleged Marxist ideological persuasions by some critics who forget the fact that in his novels Anand in a way turns the Marxist formula upside-down to show that it is the society which has betrayed or failed the human potential. Indeed, what he holds up for admiration is the striving of the individual to create the utmost freedom for himself within a coercive system. Anand's principal endeavour in his work is to realize an ideology by which man may gain a true understanding of himself and the true foundations of ethical behaviour and realize a just social order. Such an ideology obviously will have little to do with any religion as such since it is intended to uphold only

existential truths concerning human nature and moral behaviour. His life, a sketch of which follows, offers a valuable footnote to it.

Anand was born on 12 December, 1905 in a Hindu Kshatriya family in Peshawar. His father Lal Chand was a hereditary craftsman who rose to the position of a Head Clerk in the British Indian Regiment. His mother, Ishwar Kaur, hailed from a humble peasant stock. She was a loving mother who nourished her son's inborn imaginative power with mythological fables and folk tales. She had a deep, though incongruous faith in such diverse gods and godmen as Krishna, Christ, Guru Nanak and the Aga Khan, each of whom she worshipped with almost equal devotion. Her careful observance of the rituals of two or three religions evoked amusement and ridicule in her family circle. Her religious practices did not impress Anand who after the death of his pretty cousin and playmate, Kaushalya, at the age of nine,—‘the first important crisis of his life’,—came to entertain the gravest of doubts about divinity which in due course turned him into an atheist, undermining his faith in established institutions, religious, social or cultural. With the deep compassion for fellow human beings inherited from his mother, Anand set out on a quest of a social order which would ensure justice, freedom and hope to them. He was hypersensitive by nature and became physically weak on account of recurrent critical illness. He was often ignored by his playmates as a weakling, which gave him a complex, and this was indeed, a blessing in disguise, since it resulted in an aloofness conducive to contemplation and undistracted observation.

As a young boy, Anand liked his father for his rational thinking and found a ‘hero’ in him. But Lal Chand did not seek to satisfy the precocious child's raging inner needs. He was irritated with the boy's ceaseless questioning, since all that he wanted his son to aim at was the securing of a high rank in the examinations in order that he might get a prestigious government job. As a child, Anand himself was greatly fascinated by the British Sahibs and their way of life. But gradually he came to detest his father's subservience to the British government and his eagerness to instil that attitude in him. As a result Anand was eventually alienated from his father.

Anand studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar, and obtained his B.A. (Hons.) degree from the Punjab University. He fell in love with Yasmin, the sister-in-law of his friend, Noor Muhammad. Her parents married her off to an elderly railway guard but this did little to sever their relationship. Unfortunately, her husband came to know of their clandestine meetings and plan of elopement and this resulted in the sudden, mysterious death of Yasmin. Anand's involvement in this affair enraged his father, so he, encouraged by his Principal, went to London to escape from the wrath of his father and to do research in Philosophy under the guidance of Professor Dawes Hicks. There, because of his inadequate Indian education, he struggled for a time to comprehend the subtleties of Hegelian Philosophy and contemplated switching over to literature. However, he managed to overcome all handicaps with the sympathetic guidance of Professor Hicks.

On the peaks of Mount Snowdon, Anand met Irene (daughter of a Science Professor

at North Wales University) with whom he fell in love. His account of himself and Indian life interested her immensely and she urged him to put it down in black and white.

He did it promptly, and read out to her his 'long confession' enthusiastically during the weekends. She typed out the enormous manuscript for him and promised to marry him if he could find a publisher for it. When this failed, he wrote again in response to her suggestion, short novels about his memorable characters. His failure at finding a publisher for his writing seemed to have synchronised with his failure in love. But he came out successful in the academic field, and in 1930 he was awarded the Ph.D. degree for his thesis on the thought of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Russell.

Anand married Kathleen Van Gelder, a theatrical actress in 1932. She presented him with a lovely baby, Rajani. On his visit to Bombay, he was enthralled by the beautiful Anil de Silva at whose instance he started the Modern Architects and Artists' Research Group and the art magazine, *Marg*, in 1946. He rushed to London to get a divorce from Kathleen. But meanwhile Anil de Silva got married to a French man, and Anand became a nervous wreck. He was slowly nursed back to health by Melpo, a Greek dancer, at whose suggestion he wrote the novel, *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, to give vent to his feelings. He later got married to an Indian dancer, Shirin Vajifdar.

During his stay abroad, Anand made friends with many celebrities: Bonamy Dobree introduced him to the great poet, T.S. Eliot. Though Anand's relationship with Eliot remained cool, he wrote frequently for *Criterion* edited by Eliot. Herbert Read helped Anand in his creative writing with his valuable suggestions and renowned literary figures like D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Dylan Thomas, Lowes Dickinson, Eric Gill and Ananda Coomara-swamy inspired him.

Apart from engaging himself in creative writing, Anand participated in many national and international activities. In 1952 he was awarded the International Peace Prize of the World Peace Council for his services through literature, and he was the first to organise the Asian Writers' Conference. As the President of the Lalit Kala Akademi and as the founder-editor of the reputed art journal *Marg*, he rendered signal service to art and was honoured for it in 1967 by the President of India with the award of Padma Bhushan. In 1972, his novel, *Morning Face* won for him the coveted Sahitya Akademi award.

Anand's distinction as a writer lies in his themes—both in their choice and in their treatment. The themes which Anand has chosen are based on such problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors—political, economic, social and cultural. His novels have been translated into many world languages and this reflects the admiration which the world has for Anand's approach to the problems that he has tackled in them. There are eight full-length critical studies, several articles on him in other volumes and journals and two collections of scholarly articles written exclusively on Anand. This is by no means an inconsiderable critical attention which his works have so far received and it underlines the increasing awareness on the part of his critics of his significance and relevance.

9.3 A Detailed Analysis of “*Untouchable*”

What follows in this section is a detailed analysis of *Untouchable*. You are, however, advised to go through the novel first and thereafter read it.

Anand began his career with *Untouchable* (1935), a short but powerful novel which in retrospect could be regarded as quintessential Anand, since it projects most of his characteristic concerns and even ‘turns of mind’, and above all, his characteristic way of attacking from an existential basis the social evils affecting the behaviour of the members of the Hindu community.

To be drawn to the theme of evil of caste system even at the very start of his writing career as Anand has been, is understandable because it answers to his need to create in readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evils and to activate them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable or a just social order may come into being.

The choice of Bakha, a sprightly sweeper boy, as the hero of *Untouchable* marks Anand’s revolutionary departure from the tradition of fiction – writing in India. As C.D. Narasimhaiah remarks, the title gives “published information” and as the title does not have an article, Bakha seems to be a representative untouchable exemplifying the predicament of not only the so-called Hindu untouchable but also of dispossessed men everywhere. *Untouchable* is the outcome of an impassioned obsession and has no story interest as such, since it records a day’s events in Bakha’s life which serves as a mirror to the pathetic condition of the untouchables who form not only the lowest stratum of our society but also the bottom of the moral scale. What the novel projects is a picture of utter hopelessness and of degradation while emphasising the need for redemptive choice – a picture which is a telling commentary on the decadence of Hindu society.

At the very beginning of the novel, Anand gives us a vivid picture of the outcastes’ colony which provides more than what a background or a setting can. The aspects in which Bakha is represented offer an elucidating comment on the relations between the self and society considered in terms of untouchability. The colony is a dark, damp, uncongenial place. The thatched mud houses clustered together in two rows are utterly ill-fitted for human habitation. It looks as though the scavengers, leather workers, washermen, barbers, water-carriers and grass – cutters – all these inhabitants of the colony are subhuman non entities huddled up together. They should be content to live in the gutters like worms to be crushed by the superior caste people. The very fact that the colony is termed an ‘outcaste’ colony reveals that the privileged folk are totally indifferent to the welfare of its inhabitants. The sweepers who do the responsible job of maintaining cleanliness are destined to live in a locality that has never known hygiene or sanitation. Even for water, the basic necessity of human existence, the sweepers have to depend on the mercy of caste Hindus, as the wall is a ‘forbidden fruit’ for them.

Right from the very beginning, Bakha suffers a series of insults at the hands of the caste

Hindus. He sets out for work even before dawn at the rude command of his father. Cigarettes are flung at him as a bone is flung at an insistent sniffing dog; jilebis are thrown at him like a cricket ball; and the papery chapattis fly down to him from the third floor. Then comes the fateful incident of 'touching' followed by bitter abuse for daring to rest on the platform of a caste Hindu's house. Wherever, Bakha goes, he is greeted with such words as 'defiled' and 'polluted'. The privileged caste Hindus declare dictatorially : "They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth!" The anguish of all untouchables finds its expression in Bakha's agonized interrogation : "What have I done to deserve all this ?"

Bakha does not belong to the hostile society he lives in. Even when the novel opens we see that he lives in a world of illusions – a make – believe world where he could rub shoulders with the sahibs. This escape from the sordid reality into the world of fantasies by aping the west is again momentary because poverty does not allow him to live up to the standard of imitation life and reality overtakes him.

Adopting the technique of the documentary, Anand presents a sequence of events and incident of a day in Bakha's life. Indeed the day seems to be a crisis – ridden day as the incidents involving Bakha bring about the crisis of conscience which could possibly lead to self – definition. Incidents such as sweets thrown at him, a cigarette packet flung at him – not unusual or unfamiliar in themselves – are climaxed by a crucial incident, that of being slapped by an enraged person against whom he has bumped advertently. It is ironic that the man slapping him does not realize that he is himself being 'polluted' since slapping involves touching.

The identity crisis which Bakha faces is sought to be resolved through the spiritual as well as the materialistic means. The first possibility-the solution of Christian compassion – ends up in a satire of Christian missionary activities. It is also proposed that Bakha has the possibility of escaping from his degrading occupation through the conversion of latrines to the flush system. What is more important is the second solution. The one that Gandhi has to offer. Though Bakha has no personal encounter with Gandhi, it is Gandhi who enables him to realize his identity and feel one with the gathering.

It is significant that at the end of this momentous day in his life Bakha gives up his hope of becoming a gentleman which had been his way of coming to terms with his existence. Gandhi's preaching that they should realize that they are cleaning the Hindu society affords a redeeming perspective in which untouchables like Bakha could regard their work and come to appreciate the dignity of labour and that is of great significance to the very future of Indian society. Bakha exhibits great dexterity and turns the monotony of work into a source of pleasure. Unlike his friends he is very duty conscious and he finished the fifth round of work even before he could have his morning cup of tea.

Bakha's case exemplifies a situation in which the ethic of a work alone can eliminate the social alienation, even social ostracism. The conversion of latrines to the flush system is the third solution proposed by Anand. The absence of drainage system as the cause for the polluted atmosphere is hinted even at the beginning of the novel and the solution of the water. Closet

system is offered in the last part. It draws attention to the fact that by performing the degrading work assigned to him by an oppressive system, the untouchable in India is in a sense perpetuating untouchability.

Untouchable may be regarded as a classic since it brings into sharp focus what has proved debilitating to Indian society in general, and Hindu society in particular encompassing several issues affecting the condition of man not only in India but also elsewhere in the world. The novel explores the possibilities of inter-personal relations between untouchables and high caste Hindus considered in existential terms. What emerges is a kind of a message that untouchability cannot possibly be eradicated from India unless the Indians are informed by the philosophy – ‘man with man’ since any other ordering of the relationship between the two would prove frustrating. In highlighting the crises occurring in the course of a day in Bakha’s life, Anand’s purpose is to analyse the existentialistic structure of the untouchable’s ‘predicament’. The condition of the untouchable in India is not very different from that of the Negro in America and so it should be interesting to compare the novel with such Negro novels as James Baldwin’s deprivation and a kind of denaturalization of moral and other cherishable values of a civilized society. However, Anand does not seem to have paid enough attention to one profound aspect of the situation in *Untouchable*, that of his having to reckon with a kind of double consciousness, that is, the sense of the untouchable looking at himself through the eyes of the high caste Hindus – of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in contempt and pity – which is bound to give rise to a disastrous division within the self. Bakha’s predicament would have been all the more meaningful if the growth in his awareness which is sought to be plotted by the novel had been rendered more explicit through a probing of his psyche.

9.4 Let Us Sum Up

We can sum up the discussion under the given points :

- (a) The novel is almost – a one – man show but Anand manages to sustain the interest of the reader.
- (b) The novel ends with three possible solutions to eliminate untouchability but Anand cautiously avoids imposition of any one solution.
- (c) Anand finds the stratification of society on the basis of caste abominable.

9.5 Review Questions

1. Discuss Anand’s views on the rigidity of caste system on the basis of your reading the novel *Untouchable*.
2. The novel *Untouchable* is almost a one – man show. Discuss.

9.6 Bibliography

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UNIT-10

RAJA RAO : *KANTHAPURA*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 About the Age
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- 10.4 About the Novel: *Kanthapura*
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10.0 Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to initiate you to read and understand Anglo-Indian literature. There has been remarkable output in poetry and fiction in this field. Raja Rao has been a pioneer in this field. His masterpiece *Kanthapura* is prescribed for your reading. You are advised to read about the twentieth century novel written in English by Indians, the modern age's characteristics, specially the conditions of Indian sub continent and the prose works based and influenced by Indian struggle for independence to develop a capability to :

- (i) understand the socio-literary trends of modern age,
- (ii) evaluate Raja Rao's special position in Indian English literature,
- (iii) read and understand *Kanthapura*.
- (iv) critically analyse and understand various concepts and qualities of Raja Rao's fiction,

- (v) read and understand characteristics of Anglo Indian literature, and
- (vi) answer the questions based on text in your own words.

10.1 Introduction

Gandhi's Impact on Indo-English novel is a matter of considerable value. Gandhism is a complex philosophy, non-conformism being its major component. Gandhi, the non-conformist, had a deep moral fibre which did not admit of violence. Fundamentally, Gandhi was a conservative and yet an uncompromising radical. When he saw injustice in society, he did not hesitate to fight against it. Satyagraha was his powerful weapon with which he fought relentlessly until the object was achieved. His non-conformity was born of a feeling of moral wrong. There is a touch of holiness in it. Thoreau's idea of non-conformity to the evil of American slave trade and Tolstoy's notion of resistance to Russian serfdom were also more or less similar to the Gandhian concept of resistance to a moral wrong. They paved the way for Gandhi in this matter. Liberalism and humanism shape, to a large extent, the Gandhian non-conformist theory.

By introducing the new technique of non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience, Gandhi put out of action all revolutionaries, terrorists, all legalists and constitutionalists at one stroke. Such is the power of his weapon of non-conformity. This is the unique feature of Gandhi's non-conformity which shuns blood-shed and bitterness and paves the way for creative and constructive results. Consequently, both the opposing sides come to a negotiating table with feelings of understanding and cordiality.

Mahatma Gandhi has become part of the Indian consciousness in the present century, and this phenomenon is bound to exist for a long time to come despite people who hold contrary notions. The Indo-English novelists are no exception. They come under the impact of some of the facets of Gandhian thought, either consciously or unconsciously. This impact sometimes contributes to realistic elements in the novel because, however great a novelist may be, he cannot afford to ignore the social forces that shape the literary output of his period.

R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar and a host of other novelists have superbly proved how the Gandhian philosophy of non-conformism can, in different ways, be the subject matter of their writings. The fictional treatment of Gandhian non-conformism is worth examining with reference to a few major Indo-English novels.

10.2 About The Age

India was by and large an agricultural country. Land tenure system and other laws were purposely framed for the advantage of the big zamindars and taluqudars who owned big estates. These were the people who had proved their loyalty to the white masters during the bloody war of independence of 1857, and they possessed large acreage of land. But the condition of the peasant who actually tilled the land and produced harvest was extremely miserable.

Political domination of India by aliens was responsible for India's economic and social backwardness also. India's economy was so geared by the white masters as to safeguard the economic prosperity of Great Britain India was not allowed to be industrially developed. India had to be only an agricultural country which produced and supplied raw material to keep the industries of Great Britain running in full swing. The finished products of British factories were dumped on colonies like India to be consumed by their inhabitants. India was not permitted to develop her industrial potentialities lest British industries should come to harm.

The people of India who had been struggling for generations against tyranny showed fight. The peasant movement had already become a strong factor in the Indian National struggle. The All India Trade Union Congress had launched several campaigns and nurtured socialist consciousness through the years.

Indian movement for securing national independence was very much different from any other Revolution, -say French Revolution, Russian Revolution or American Civil War. Ours was neither a bloody revolution nor an armed struggle for power. It demanded of all Indians a radically new approach to life. It was an emotional as well as an ideological experience spread over a much longer period of time than any other nationalist revolution in world history.

Indian national movement was not a single movement. On the contrary it was a combination of many different forces, working sometimes together in the same direction and sometimes in contrary directions. No doubt Gandhian ideology was the prime mover. But along with it were also working the leftist, the terrorist and the revolutionary parties, towards the same end though through different means. The Gandhian way itself had different meanings for different kinds of people. For some it was a philosophy of life. For others it was an expedient strategy in achieving freedom of the country. Some people turned Gandhi into a saint and to them Gandhiji's teachings were a sort of quasi-religious dogmas. The ideas of different parties often came into conflict, and the men, who matured during those eventful decades, felt the pull of different ideologies and often shifted their loyalties from one to the other.

These were the years of heady action and the simultaneous happening of a wide variety of events blurred and confused the basic issues. Any novelist dealing with those turbulent years had to impose an order upon the splendid chaos and thus to discern a pattern in it to illuminate the human situation.

The impact of Mahatma Gandhi's personality and his programme on this period and its literature was so great, that it will, not be improper to call it Gandhian Age. This period of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle has important milestones like the Khilafat Movement (1920-21), his Satyagrah against the salt law (1930-31), the Quit India Movement (1942), till independence was achieved in 1947.

10.3 About The Author

Raja Rao was born in 1909 at Hossan, Mysore, in a South Indian Brahman family.

His father was a professor of Canarese in Hyderabad. After his schooling there he went to Aligarh University for the study of the French language. He took his B.A. from Nizan College, Hyderabad. He was selected by government as Hyderabad Scholar to study at the University of Montpellier in France. After sometime he went to Paris and studied literature under the guidance of the well-known writer Professor Cazamian at the University of Sorbonne. He lived in France from 1927 to 1939 and again from 1946 to 1956. He spent the war years in India. He spent some months in 1942 at Gandhiji's Ashram. He lectured at various American universities on Indian philosophy.

Raja Rao gave up his research and took up writing stories in French and English. He tried to follow the spiritual tradition of his homeland. He undertook a spiritual quest and it took him to all the parts of India, from the Himalayas to the Cape Comorin. *The Serpent and the Rope*, his most famous novel, is the conclusion of his voyage.

He saw and experienced for himself that the Western culture which was based on materialistic acquisitions, really implied. When he returned to India, he felt deep stirrings of religious and spiritual crisis in his life. He sought the company of Swami Atmanand, the great Vedantist philosopher, and accepted him as his Guru. By this time Raja Rao had already produced his famous novel *Kanthapura* and a collection of short stories. In this novel and the short stories, we see him a consummate artist. His writings of this earlier phase show him an ardent patriot and a social reformer.

In the novel and the short stories that Raja Rao wrote in the early phase of his literary career, he has dealt with political, economic and social problems of the day. In *Kanthapura* and short stories, like *The Cow of the Barricades*, *Narsiq*, *Akkyya* and *Javni*, even a cursory reader can easily find out detailed treatment of national struggle for India's independence, economic exploitation of the poor Indian coolies by the white managers of the coffee estates and social evils like child marriage, unequal marriage, untouchability, superstitiousness, extreme poverty and the like.

After the spiritual crisis, Raja Rao's vision changed. He developed more and more interest in religion, philosophy and metaphysics. In the two novels, *The Serpent and Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* that Raja Rao produced after a considerable gaps of time, he comes before the reader as a writer who deals with man in relation to religion and philosophy. In the earlier phrase of his literary career. Raja Rao has dealt with man in relation to society and to economic and political environments. Thus the theme, tone, style and the outlook on life adopted by Raja Rao in the second phase to which belong his later novels mark a complete and extreme departure from those of earlier phase.

Raja Rao is a consummate literary artist. With the skill of a true artist he has exercised judicious care in picking and choosing such aspects of Indian life as suited his point of view, which he wanted to convey to his readers. His point of view in each novel is circumscribed by the subject matter of that particular novel. For this purpose Raja Rao has selected one particular

person in each of his novels to narrate the incidents. The personality of the narrator as well as his or her mental emotional and religious outlook on life is in keeping with the kind effect and the atmosphere that Raja Rao aimed at creating in the novels.

10.4 About the Novel: *Kanthapura*

10.4.1 Introduction

Raja Rao's novel, *Kanthapura*, published in 1938, seems to have provided the 'freer form' as well as a new dimension of sensibility recognizably Indian and contemporaneous. In his Foreword to *Kanthapura* Raja Rao reveals his awareness of the need to find a creative approximation of the Western novel form to the Indian experience. Apart from the obvious Indian accent in its language, *Kanthapura* reveals the author's skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and discourse at once authentically Indian and convincingly modern.

Kanthapura is a work in which the fictional form is endowed with the freedom of the romance, the amplitude of the epic, and the symbolic centrality of the fable. It is 'Ithihasa' and 'Purana' both unified into a 'Kavya'.

Kanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively, but as a living experience moving in time and space. The three levels of action in the novel, political, social and religious, are all related to a unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present.

Kanthapura is the penumbra of a village significantly called 'Kanthapura' with its life and politics, its entrenched orthodoxy and extreme conservatism. The action of the novel dates back to 1930's when the Gandhian ideas aroused the popular emotion and sentiment and paved the way for a non-violent destruction of the imperialistic hegemony. The whole village heroically goes through the ordeal of the terroristic orgy let loose by the 'Red-men's' government, and in the end there is nothing left.

Apart from the suggested feeling of an awe-inspiring experience that has rocked the village with the tremors of a new political consciousness, the observation symbolically prefigures a new dimension of experience won out of, and affected by the turmoil just passed. There is still faith, but it is a faith open to circumspection and qualified, not by the stillness of space, but the terrible vibrancy of time. Thus the novel moves from time into space and again from space into time.

10.4.2 Detailed Summary

The novel is not divided into chapters. However, the novel has nineteen parts. These parts have not been numbered by the novelist and no separate titles are given to them. A detailed summary of the whole text is being given here. You are advised to read the text after this.

The novel '*Kanthapura*' is the story of a village named 'Kanthapura'. In the beginning of the novel the village referred to as "Our village" is Kanthapura. It is situated in the Western Ghats. It is a small village. There are two shopkeepers. Kenchamma is the goddess of the village. The village is divided into quarters for the various communities. The river Himvathy flows near the village. There is a temple called Kanthapuwari temple. Dore, though he had not passed even the intermediate class, was called the university graduate. He wore a khadi dhoti and called himself a Gandhiman. Moorthy was a young Brahmin. He was quite generous and serene. He was the son of Narsamma. Once he discovered a half Shiva Linga. The village people decided to celebrate 'Shankar-Jayanti' in a grand manner. Then they celebrated Ram, Krishna and Ganesh festivals. Moorthy collected one hundred and forty-seven rupees from the villagers. Jayaramachar, a famous 'Harikatha man' came and told many religious stories and the story of Mahatma Gandhi. He was, however, one day taken away by a policeman and was never heard of again. Two days later a policeman Bade Khan came to Kanthapura to live in the village. The expulsion of Jayaramchar made a big voice in the city. Moorthy became a Gandhian in earnest. He went to see the Congress leaders in Karwar and returned with Gandhian literature and spinning-wheels for free distribution among the village men and women. Gandhi Bhajans were daily sung. The spinning wheel became very popular. Bade Khan, the policeman saw all this development. Bhatta was against all this. He began to go to the city more often perhaps for his business, perhaps for informing the police secretly. His wife had died by slipping at the well. He married a young girl again and got a handsome dowry. He warned the village women against Moorthy's visiting the Pariah quarters. Bhatta did not like the young widow Ratna. Moorthy began to mix with the Pariahas and work for their well-being. The village women told Narsamma that her son would be outcasted for mixing with the untouchables. She was very much worried. Moorthy continued his work with the Pariahas. One day he even helped them carry a dead woman's body. Every villager saw this. Bhatta came from the city and gave the news that Moorthy's whole family had been turned out of caste. This shocked Narsamma so much that she soon died. He lived as an outcaste now. But continued his work with the Pariahas. Seenu helped him in his work.

The Skeffington Coffee Estate was very big. It was started by Hunter Sahib. Coolies came from the neighbouring villages to work here on very little wages and lived here. In fact no one who came here never returned to his village. The old Sahib treated them in a very cruel manner. They were often beaten cruelly by the foremen. After the death of the old Sahib, his nephew came. He became the new Sahib. He was not so cruel. He did not beat the coolies. He was, however, a bad character. He often took away young girls and beat their fathers or husbands when they refused to send them. Once he shot dead a Brahmin clerk who refused to send his daughter. The Pariahas and other coolies invited Moorthy to the Estate to teach them reading and writing. This led to great trouble and violence. Moorthy was very much pained at the violence that took place at the Skeffington Estate. He observed a three day fast. After the fast was over Moorthy felt lighter in body and lighter in soul. He now decided to start the 'Don't touch the Government campaign'. Moorthy met Range Gowda. He told him about

starting a Congress Group in Kanthapura. Most of the people agreed to become members of the Congress. Moorthy was chosen President of the Congress Panchayat Committee.

The month of Kartik was regarded as very important in Kanthapura. Lamps were kept lit throughout the night in all streets. It was believed that in this month gods visited the streets during the night. Before dawn, many policemen along with an Inspector came to Rangamma's house and began searching Moorthy's room. Range Gowda and others had also arrived there by now. The Inspector got Moorthy hand-cuffed. There was a great crowd of people and they asked why their leader was being taken. There was disturbance. The police beat many persons with sticks. Moorthy spoke to the people and advised them to remain calm and non-violent. People prayed to gods for help. They kept fast. Many advocates offered to defend Moorthy at the trial. Moorthy refused to allow any defence. He believed that Truth needs no defence. A huge meeting was held in the Gandhi Maidan at Karwar. Rangamma and many others spoke in the meeting. Rangamma, the advocate was also arrested. After the meeting a procession was organised which was soon violently dispersed by the police. People of Kanthapura learnt all this from the newspapers which also printed Moorthy's picture. Seenu and Vasudev often went to Karwar and Brought news of Moorthy. Rangamma also went to Karwar. She stayed with Sankar, the advocate who was looking after Moorthy's affairs. Rangamma had learnt 'yoga' and meditation from Sahdu Narain at Karwar. She began to teach the same to the women of KanthapurA. Due to her inspiration a women's volunteer corps called the Sevika Sangha, was formed. They vowed to follow Gandhi's ideals of Truth and Non-violence.

The people had not forgotten Moorthy. The time for his release was near. Everyone was thinking of giving him a rousing welcome. But soon it was learnt that he had already been released. After Moorthy's arrival in the village the villagers were very happy. They were ready for new activities suggested by Moorthy. Moorthy's home-coming was the beginning of action. He gave the news of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March programme. He advised every villager to prepare for non-violent action against the Government. Don't touch the Government', campaign was to start again the next week. They decided not to pay any taxes to the Government. The news of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest came. It was decided to begin the campaign on Friday, the seventeenth.

It was decided to picket Borranna's toddy booth. They chose Tuesday because that was market day in Kanthapura. A large number of people had come from other villages. The Satyagrahis marched towards Kenchamma grove where the Boranna's toddy booth stood. They were seventy seven in number. Soon the coolies came to drink wine. The policemen were with them. The Satyagrahis marched forward and squatted down before the toddy booth. It began raining. They began shouting "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai". The police began beating the coolies to force them to move forward but there was no room for that. The police began beating the Satyagrahis – men as well as women. Many men and women fell unconscious. They were then taken in a lorry and left near the temple. Seenu, Vasudev, Siddayya and Range

Gowda were arrested. About thirty Pariahas came with their families to live in Kanthapura from the Skeffington Estate. The Satyagrah was very successful. Boranna closed his shop. People in other villages also picketed their toddy booth. Altogether twenty-four toddy shops were closed down in the villages around Kanthapura. A new Patel was appointed in Kanthapura.

Now began the big fight. In a very large number policemen arrived in Kanthapura. They arrested Moorthy and Rangamma and carried them away at night. The Skeffington coolies who had come to live in Kanthapura were forced to move through the streets. Their women and children wept. The whole village was full of policemen.

Many men were taken prisoners but many more men were still free and hiding in the jungle. Three days passed. On Saturday many Sahib-looking people came in cars. The fields of Rangamma, Seetharama and Range Gowda were being auctioned. All the women gathered at Sami's house. Ratna was their chief guide now. The city boys and the Mahatma's volunteers had come to help them. Many of the Kanthapura men were also there. They decided to hold a "Sataynarayana Puja" and go in the streets in a procession. The procession started with Ratna blowing the conch. The police Inspector stopped the procession after sometime. The policemen started beating the women. Men came from all round from their hiding places to protect the women. They cried "Inqalab Zindabad." The satyagrah led by Ratna took a violent turn. There were soldiers everywhere near the fields. Coolies came from the Skeffington Coffee Estate and joined the Satyagrahis. Kanthapura men who were hiding in the jungle also came. There was heavy lathi charge and firing. Many men, women and children were wounded. Many were killed. Soldiers attacked the non-violent Satyagrahis with their rifles. Ratna tried her best to see that the fight remained non-violent from their side. Thirty people gathered there. They left the village and reached Maddur. There they left their wounded persons and marched forward. They came to the Cavery in Mysore state. They were welcomed by the villagers who called them the Pilgrims of the Mahatma. It was the village Kashipura. Most of the Kanthapura villagers had left their village. Many of them had come to live in the village Kashipura in Mysore state. Many men were still in prison. Rachanna, Rangamma and Seenu were in prison. Moorthy, Ratna and Range Gowda had been freed. Moorthy's views had undergone some change. He had now come to believe that independence was not enough, social customs and economic system should also change. He had become an admirer of Nehru and his views about socialism. Range Gowda also lived in Kashipura. Kanthapura was in ruins. New houses had been built on hills surrounding the village. Men from Bombay had built houses on the Bebbur Mound, houses like those of the city, for coolies, and they had owned many lands there.

10.4.3 Critical Analysis

The story is narrated by a grandmother who herself had taken part in the momentous struggle for freedom. The narrator, with all her whimsy and garrulity, is a symbol of the Indian sense of the past. She is a superb raconteur and myth-maker, who combines art and acumen,

and the narration accordingly takes a meandering course flowing backwards and forwards 'mixing memory with desire'.

The very first description of the village is brilliantly evocative :

High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar Coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane.

This is where Kanthapura is situated. At a distance beyond Bebbur Mound and Bear's Hill, there is Skeffington Coffee Estate, symbolizing the impact of industrialization on this little rural community. And across it flows the sacred river Himavathy. In the main street Promontory is the temple of Kanthapurishwari, the centre of the people's life and later their rendezvous with destiny.

The sense of place dominates the novel ; the Kenchamma Hill, the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the temple of Kanthapurishwari, the rivers Himavathy and Cauvery are all topographical signals of a country which is at once landscape, life, history, people, ideas and ideals. Kanthapura is rooted in the deep-seated custom and authority, superstition and ritualism of Indian folk-life. Moorthy, the village Mahatma, Bhatta, the pontifical Brahmin, Bade Khan the policeman and Rangegowda the Patel of the village, are all individuals as well as types. Around this bustle of life and concourse of humanity, the action of the novel is adumbrated.

While Kanthapura is thus emerging towards a new national consciousness the 'Red-men' indulge in ruthless persecution. As a result, the mass movement, instead of being suppressed and nipped in the bud, gathers strength and momentum. The 'Red-men' noticing the gravity of the situation, indulge in relentless suppression and the chief leaders of the movement are apprehended and incarcerated. But the movement brooks no emotional retreat; Rangamma, one of their own folk, comes into the breach and keeps the movement going. The 'Sevika Sangha' organizes passive resistance against the wickedness of the foreign rule.

But it proves an unequal fight and the satyagrahis are mercilessly put down, and all ends in a terrible fiasco. Yet the valiant struggle attains the dimensions of a heroic myth. Kanthapura is 'destroyed, but not defeated,' and the memory and the image of this battle are cherished in tale and legend, and enshrined in the living tradition of folk-lore.

Raja Rao's penchant for the vernacular rhythm and spirit adds depth and momentum to English idiom, and rarely subverts the functional contours of the language. As Raja Rao observes, the language may be alien, but the style is to be native.

The sentences have the typical prosodic movement of the Kannada language and can effectively transmute 'the vigour and simplicity of the domestic argument' and the living sense of traditional wisdom too. There are even literal translations of names such as water-fall Venkamma, Front-house Akkamma, Corner-house Moorthy etc.

The Gandhian movement itself is absorbed into the ritualistic pattern, and the agonies

and ecstasies experienced by the people are attuned to the vicissitudes of the collective kaleidoscope of human existence. The secular symbolism of Gandhi is keyed up to the mythology of the community. Accordingly, the living bardic traditions of Harikatha, folk-song 'bhajan' and rituals are adapted to the new aesthetic needs of the people. The satyagraha ideal is equated with the 'Satyanarayana vrata' ; Gandhi the 'Daridra Narayana' is presented as the 'avatar' of 'Satyanarayana.' Thus Kanthapura, as a continual and self-transcending human experience, frames the entire narrative action of the novel.

It is the singular fusion of poetry and politics, the perennial with the present, that makes *Kanthapura* a distinctive novel, almost a new species of fiction.

10.4.4 Gandhism

Raja Rao wrote *Kanthapura* in 1938. It is a novel about the freedom movement of India. It was a time of doubts and despair, but under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the whole nation had risen into a big non-violent army. At certain places people could not remain non-violent and thus violated the pledge taken before launching the Satyagrah. People might not have understood the full implications of Gandhi's philosophy but it was enough for them to know that he was keenly interested in their uplift and was fighting for the poor and the untouchables. He was a superman and his name had the incantatory power. In a remote village Kanthapura the wave of non-violent non-cooperation movement had swept so hard that even the most conservative and inert people could not remain unaffected. Like other villages of India Kanthapura also came under the impact of dynamic and benign guidance of Mahatma Gandhi.

10.4.5 Humour and Irony

Humour and irony is thus like other devices used by Raja Rao to add another local colour to the regional novel. The irony can't be the irony of vision or alternative in a novel like *Kanthapura* which is an enthusiastic depiction of the deep involvement of the people of Kanthapura in the non-violent non-cooperation movement. Here ideals were involved and the devotion to the cause of freedom was serious, whole-hearted. But despite this gravity of purpose the novelist has used his skill to exploit the irony of the situation and character by portraying as accurately as possible the life of the peol of a typically Indian village inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

10.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Discuss *Kanthapura* as the legend of Mahatma Gandhi.
2. Write a note on title of the novel *Kanthapura*.
3. What is the dominant theme of *Kanthapura*?

4. How was Moorthy attracted to Gandhiji?
5. Describe the role played by Ratna in *Kanthapura*.

10.6 Answers To Self Assessment Questions

1. *Kanthapura* can very easily be placed at the centre of Gandhian literature for depicting truthfully and artistically the upsurge of Gandhian movement. Raja Rao has given a larger perspective of Gandhian ideology by placing him in the tradition of Rama, Krishna, the Buddha and other great saints who boldly came forward, even risked life, to lead the erring humanity to economic prosperity and spiritual satisfaction.
2. It has a historical quality, an epic dignity. It comes with the story of Gandhiji's impact on a small village. There is an abundance of episodes and there are plenty of persons. It abounds in beautiful descriptions. It covers the beginning of a new epoch in India of the thirties.
3. *Kanthapura* is a political novel written about that fateful period in the history of Freedom movement which was very much under the impact of Mahatma Gandhi. From 1916 to 1947 he dominated the political scene and influenced almost every one in some way or the other. *Kanthapura* is a story of mass awakening. It is the story of the people's movement. It is the saga of the national awareness. It is the story of people's involvement in the liberation movement.
4. Moorthy was a student at the University. Mahatma Gandhi was giving shape to India's freedom struggle. Men, women and children were following him selflessly. Doctors, teachers, and lawyers became his disciples. Moorthy who was the youngest child of a conservative brahmin family joined Gandhi's movement against untouchability and casteism and slavery. He pledged to dedicate his life to the cause of the people as directed by Gandhiji.
5. Ratna was a widow of hardly fifteen years ago. She was fiery and could hold "a word for word fight" with anyone. She was unconventional and bold. She defied the conventions that shackled freedom of a widow by parting her hair like a concubine and putting on bangles, the emblems of marital status. In the absence of Jayaramchar she took upon herself the responsibility of educating Kanthapurians through Harikathas. She was one of the active supporters of Moorthy.

10.7 Let Us Sum Up

Kanthapura is a sensitive portrayal of the real Indian of the Gandhian era during struggle for independence. After reading about the socio-political scenario of India and Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*, you will be able to :

- (i) evaluate socio-economic and political conditions of Indian Society in twentieth century,

- (ii) analyse Gandhian impact on Indian people,
- (iii) assess Raja Rao literary genius,
- (iv) trace and evaluate Gandhian impact on literary writings of the period.
- (v) understand and appreciate *Kanthapura*, and
- (vi) answer the questions based on the text.

10.8 Review Questions

1. Discuss Gandhian impact on *Kanthapura*.
2. How did Gandhi attract the attention of common man?
3. *Kanthapura* has a plethora of characters but all the figures are impressive”. Justify.
4. Discuss development of story in *Kanthapura*.
5. Draw a character sketch of Ratna.
6. Write a note on ‘The Sheffington Coffee Estate’.
7. Write an essay on *Kanthapura* as a thesis novel.
8. Discuss *Kanthapura* as a typical regional novel.
9. Write a note on plot-construction of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*.
10. Give a short and simple critical evaluation of *Kanthapura*.

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UNIT-11

R.K. NARAYAN : *THE GUIDE*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 About the Age
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- 11.4 About the Novel: *The Guide*
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11.0 Objectives

In this unit I propose to initiate you to read a contemporary classic, *The Guide*. This masterpiece penned by R.K. Narayan has attracted reading public and critics all over the world. This unit seeks to present R.K. Narayan's art with simplicity and clarity. The Indo-Anglian prose writings will also be discussed along with the literary trends prevalent in twentieth century. You are advised to read about twentieth century literary scenario, life and literary genius of R.K. Narayan, his major works and *The Guide* to develop capability to :

- (i) read about characteristic features of twentieth century prose writings,
- (ii) evaluate the novel in twentieth century,
- (iii) understand and evaluate R.K. Narayan as a novelist,

- (iv) read and understand *The Guide*.
- (v) critically analyse and evaluate various concepts and qualities of *The Guide*, and
- (vi) answer the questions in your own words.

11.1 Introduction

Macaulay's 'Minutes' on Education is a landmark in the history of English education in India. In the Minutes Macaulay advocated the cause of English and said that we have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language.

The study of English and Western science on the whole proved very fruitful. It developed a scientific and rational approach to life, and educated Indians could shake off much of their conservatism and narrowness of outlook. Contact with the English language and literature was fruitful to the regional languages, as it led to the growth and development of creative literature in these tongues.

It was the dissemination of English that led to the upsurge of nationalism and the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century. In the early decades of the century Indians took to the language with enthusiasm, and many of them tried their hand at literary composition in English. Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to write in English.

While English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indians from earliest times with rare force, eloquence and effectiveness, excellence in the writing of creative prose could be achieved much later than in the writing of verse. But despite its late start, the novel has gone far ahead of poetry both in quantity and quality. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indo-Anglian novel really came to its own. The ideals of the Indian struggle for freedom are reflected in such novels as K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan*, *The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan*, *The Patriot* (1932). With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Rajo Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the novel in English may be said to have come of age. Today the Indian novelists writing in English are large in number. Besides Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, there are also K. Nagarajan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desari. All these novelists, and many more, have considerably enriched Indo-Anglian fiction.

The Indian novel made such a late start because, in the beginning, it had to face a number of peculiar problems. One of the most difficult problems which had to be faced was the problem of language. The Indian writer in English must evolve a language flexible and varied enough to suit different fictitious characters drawn from most varied professions and strata of society, as well as Indian enough to create the impression of verisimilitude and authenticity. He must also create an Indian atmosphere. Mulk Raj Anand has tried to solve the

problem of medium by Indianisation of English words, by literal translation into English of Indian expressions, proverbs, etc., and the result has not always been a happy one.

In short, Indo-Anglian literature continues to grow and flourish and this despite all the misguided and prejudiced and politically motivated campaign against English as a 'foreign' language, a language which comes in the way of its growth. More Indians are writing in English than ever before, and the Indo-Anglian writer is enjoying a much wider market. It has, indeed, a bright future.

11.2 About The Age

The uncertainty of the War- and post-War years is reflected in the concern of many novelists about the disintegration of society, and their lack of positive optimism, while the frequency with which violence and sadism appear as themes is not surprising in a world grown accustomed to the thought of genocide, global conflict, and nuclear destruction.

However, many of the younger generation of writers are involved in the new psychological problems arising from the bizarre and contradictory nature of an affluent society which is discontented with itself, and yet is interested chiefly in retaining or acquiring material comforts. A mixture of realism, cynicism, dark comedy, shrewd comment, and satire is used to express their search for stability and basic values. Stark individualism is often the essence of characterization ; novelists are not infrequently interested in the individual's flight from an environment with which he cannot cope, or his attempts to find satisfaction by abandoning selfishness for love, service, and even sacrifice. The future is rarely clear; happiness is often the discovery of some small assurance amid an uncertain and even incomprehensible environment.

This treasury of novels has been made available chiefly because of the revolution in publishing. Writers today enjoy a larger public and wield a vaster power because of the new-style paperback volume. This dates from the issue of ten sixpenny books by Penguin in 1935. Aided by the insatiable wartime demand, paperbacks have become an essential part of most people's leisure.

The novel, in the modern sense, came to be written in India only as a consequence of the British contact. Such didactic stories as those of the Hitopadesh, the Jataka Kathas and the Panchtantra and extended narratives as Dashkumar-Charita and Kadambari were known to Indian readers even before the Western novels of Balzac, Hugo, Scott and Dickens were seen by them. But in those stories situations were timeless and mere pretexts for extracting the moral. Their writers did not reveal any historical sense for they never intended to study man in various social relationships in depth. Their primary aim was to see life by values, and not by time. The alliance of time and man, being a new concept, came to influence the attitude of the modern writer.

In India a new class of intellectuals, in consequence of the British contact, rose to share and communicate its awareness of time and place through novels. However, the attitudes

of these intellectuals took time to crystalize, and their thoughts and feelings to become purposive and pointed. Once the intellectuals had spelt out their goal and plans, they had only to speak out their mind. This was done in sages : initially historical romances were written to distance contemporary concerns and, thus, escape censure at the hands of the British Government ; but in a couple of decades the Indo-Anglians felt emboldened to voice their views openly.

11.3 About The Author

R.K. Narayan was born on 10th October, 1906 in Madras. His father was the Principal of a School in a village named Rasipuram in Salem district. His father's name was Krishna Swami Iyer.

As is the custom in the South 'R' in his name stands for the name of the village to which his family belonged – Rasipuram – in the district of Salem. 'K' stands for the name of his father Krishna-swami Iyer. The full form of 'Narayan' is Narayamaswami, though the novelist now never uses this full form. He calls himself simply 'Narain' and never 'Narainaswami'. Though the family belonged originally to Rasipuram, long before R.K. Narayan's birth, the family had shifted to Madras. It was here that Narayan was born in 1906. Soon after his birth the father got a job as a school teacher in Mysore, and the family moved there. While other brothers and sisters went to Mysore with their parents, R.K. Narayan himself was left behind with his grandmother. It was only later that he too shifted to Mysore, which has been his home ever since.

The novelist was never a good student. He failed both in the High School and Intermediate examinations. He could get his degree only when he was twenty-four years old. These failures at school and college have made him shy, reserved and diffident, an introvert and not an extrovert. It is said that once he even tried to commit suicide. Ever since he has been reserved and modest, rather too modest.

First, he worked for some time as a clerk in the Mysore Secretariat, and then as a teacher in a village school. But both these professions did not suit him. His ambition, even as early as his school days, had always been to become a writer, So, only after a month or so he gave up his job as a school teacher, and decided to devote all his time to writing.

The most important event of his life took place in 1935, when he met his future wife Rajam, for the first time. It was a case of love at first sight. Narayan went straight to the girl's father, Nageshwara Iyer, and proposed marriage. It was something most unusual and unconventional but the parents were impressed by his frankness and honesty, and agreed to the marriage.

Their marriage was a very happy one. Though Rajam did not know English, she took keen interest in the work of her husband, and was a constant source of inspiration to him. A number of his women-characters bear close resemblance to her character and personality. One daughter, Hema, was born to them, and she was dearly loved by her parents. As a novelist

also, Narayan was fast becoming a success. Three of his novels *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), and *The Dark Room* (1938) published in quick succession, enjoyed wide popularity and brought him money as well as fame.

He was awarded Padma Bhusan in 1964, University of Leeds conferred on him the Honorary D. Litt in 1967, and Delhi University followed suit in 1973. He has been included in the *Writers and Their Works* series being published by the British Council ; he is the only Indian so far to have achieved this distinction. He visited the U.S.A. in 1956, on an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation. Many of his stories and sketches have been broadcast by the B.B.C., a rare distinction. His works have been published both in England and the U.S.A. and in both these countries he has enjoyed wide popularity. In America he is regarded next only to Faulkner and Graham Greene.

11.4 About the Novel: *The Guide*

11.4.1 Introduction

The Guide (1958) is a novel about an average man whose evolution is curious like that of his beloved – from a stall-keeper he came to be a Mahatma as Rosie from a devadasi came to be a dancer of world renown. They are creatures of the earth who act out their fantasies, finally to succumb to the external force of conventions of the society to which they belong. Neither are they, nor do they pretend to be great. They are mere actors in the comedie humaine of Narayan’s world of average emotions and actions.

The attitude of the novelist is neither didactic nor romantic. The love of Raju for Rosie forms only a part of the novel, a medium for the realization of dreams. Rosie was a golden illusion for him the same way as was the sainthood he had aspired to achieve while living among the ignorant peasants. Raju was as well aware of the qualities of his character as the ironies of the circumstances. The novel abounds in self-criticism, although never self-reproach. An atmosphere of unreality hangs over the whole novel.

He had created, as the novelist said, “a giant with his own puny self, a throne of authority with a slab stone.” The net that Raju the actor cast on his admirers actually fell on himself. Told by Velan that his penance was similar to Mahatma Gandhi’s and that the Mahatma had left a disciple in him to save the people he felt obliged to admire Velan’s credulity.

Raju acquired his faith from the pure and simple-hearted devotion of the villagers. Besides, the locale itself abetted his inclination to self-sacrifice. Sheltered in the ancient shrine, he acquired probably enough strength to renounce temptations and rid himself of wordly desires.

11.4.2 Detailed Summary

Chapter : I

The chapter opens with Raju sitting near a temple. Velan, a resident of the village

Mangal meets him. He takes him for a holy man. Raju thinks of his coming out of the jail gate and going to the barber near the jail. Raju's early life is described. Raju lived in an old temple by the river. When Velan said that he had a problem concerning his sister. Raju felt himself important and answered like Buddha that everyone had a problem. Velan was greatly impressed. The night fell and Raju began to count the stars to pass time. Then he slept. In the morning when he woke up at 8 o'clock, Velan was already there with his sister. After morning ablutions, Raju attended them. Velan offered him a basket of fruits which he would have rejected formerly in his preference for coffee but now after jail-life he liked them and readily accepted. Then Raju told Velan that he would think of his problem some other time when he had given it due thought. Raju looked at the sister of Velan significantly and said what had to happen, would definitely happen. Velan was satisfied. They went back home and Raju watched them cross the river. While narrating his own story at a later stage, Raju told Velan that his troubles started on account of Rosie who was an orthodox Indian dancer and she liked herself being admired as a dancer. Raju utilised the first opportunity to tell her that she was a great dancer. Raju told Velan that he became a tourist guide for no special reason but because it was fated. He used to receive tourists at the railway station of Malgudi. Railways got into his blood very early in his life.

Chapter : II

The chapter begins with the description of Raju's home town and coming of Railways. This changed Raju's life. His father became rich. Raju's schooling is described. Raju's life as a holy man is described. Raju thinks of leaving the temple but he does not go. He sends a message to the villagers that he would continue living in the village temple. Very soon Velan came to Raju and reported that everything had turned out well and that his sister had confessed her mistake and agreed to marry the same boy. He added that it was a great surprise to him and that he would get through the ceremony of her marriage at the earliest. The circle of Raju's devotees began to widen gradually. He felt uncomfortable in their presence, but could not stop them because it was a public place. He wanted to escape from their company. Raju began thinking where he could go. Here in the temple, food was coming to him unasked. Another place where food could come without effort was prison. He decided that he should play the role that Velan had given him and stay there in the temple. He thought of going to the village but it was undignified. He called a boy who was grazing his sheep on the other side of the river.

Chapter : III

The day on which the first train came was a great day in the life of the town and its people. Soon Raju's father was given a shop at the railway station. After sometime Raju's father entrusted the charge of the station shop to Raju. Raju left the school and gave all his time to the shop. One fine day the railway station building together with everything else was decorated. All the spare hours of Raju were spent along the railway track. On the day when the first train came, the station was decorated beautifully. Raju's father's business increased. He became rich. He bought a carriage and a horse in spite of Raju's mother's strong objections. His father

explained to her that he had much work in the town and bank. But his arguments went in vain and she always viewed it to be an unnecessary luxury and nagged him. Raju's father was given the privilege of running a shop at the railway station. It was a cement shop, a lot better than the hut shop. All the articles of the old shop were transferred to his new shop. The station master in whose eyes the father was very respectful, suggested that commodities like rice etc. be removed to some other shop and fruits be put in their place. Thus soon there were bunches of bananas, oranges and other fruits and packets of cigarettes in the shop. In the beginning Raju's father sat at the station-shop while Raju was given the charge of the hut-shop.

Chapter : IV

Raju gave a banana to the shepherd boy and sent him to the village to tell the people that he had come back and had decided to stay there permanently. The banana worked a miracle. The boy informed the villagers that the saint was back. A large number of villagers flocked to see him. Raju advised them that they must read at least in the evening and asked them to send their village school teacher to him. Next afternoon when Raju was having a nap, a timid man with turban turned up. In half sleep Raju's old fears of school teachers returned. But soon he recovered his composure and spoke with anxiety, "I like to see young boys literate and intelligent." The teacher accepted to do his bit under Raju's guidance. Next day with a dozen of boys the school started in the pillared hall of the temple. The children were enchanted by the talk of Raju and they described everything to their parents who also joined them. All of them looked upon Raju as a great saint. Raju also felt like an actor. Soon the women also started coming. The whole temple was decorated with buntings. Raju realised that his spiritual status would increase if he grew a beard and long hair. He underwent many stages of make-up and by the time his beard grew, his prestige had grown very high.

Chapter : V

Gradually Raju gained importance and every tourist came asking for Railway Raju. His friend Gaffur had an old car which took tourists at different places. Soon Raju became a full-blown tourist guide. A porter's son sat at Raju's shop. Raju came only to count cash. His minimum charge was Rs.10/- He charged more for far-off places. He was interested in all those places and things in which his customers were interested. He arranged the witnessing of elephant-traps, tiger-shoots, dancing of cobra or anything that his tourists demanded. One day two tourists came there. They were Marco and Rosie. They were husband and wife, but their tastes were absolutely different. Marco was a scholar interested in old historical places. Marco and Rosie came from Madras. Rosie wanted to see king cobra the moment she got down at Malgudi. Next day Raju took them out for sight-seeing. Since Rosie's hearty desire was to see a cobra. She asked for Marco's permission which he readily gave. Marco was busy in studying the temple and the carvings there. Rosie went with Raju in Gaffur's car. The next day Marco, Rosie and Raju reached the Peak House at about four. Joseph, the caretaker of the house was delighted to see them. Raju had often rewarded him with the money of his clients, so he knew Raju well. Raju requested Marco to pay some amount to Joseph, but

Marco who did not want to be disturbed by small botheratons, and wanted voucher for every payment, gave him some money and gave him charge of arrangements. After dinner, Raju and Rosie sat in the glass-verandah in the dark to watch the proling beasts. Marco remained absorbed in his papers in the room. Raju sitting very close to her, told her that she could see lions, tigers and panthers through the glass Marco was happy to be left alone in the room and so ws Rosie happy in darkness and silence. Raju was overwhelmed by her perfume. Raju's sympathy with Rosie had a magical effect on her. She told him frankly about her daily quarrels with Marco. She told him how she married Marco. When Raju asked her why she had married such a man, she replied that it had just happened an that she belonged to a family dedicated to the temples as dancers and that they were considered public women. She added that a different life was planned for her by her mother because she was educated. Raju sighed on hearing Rosie's family trouble and her quarrels with Marco. He was deeply overcome with the sadness of her life. Entangling his fingers into the lovely locks of her hair and feeling the softness of her ear, he promised that he would have made her the queen of the world, if he had been her husband in Marco's place. She did not mind all this.

Chapter VI

This chapter deals with Raju's story as a saint in the temple. Raju's fame went on increasing. There were no rains in the village. There was drought. Due to some misunderstanding Velan and others thought that Raju was going to observe a long fast. So no food now was offered to him. Once summer seemed to continue and there were no rains. Velan and others looked anxious. There was no millet-sowing, banana-seedlings were dead and the cattle remained hungry for want of fodder. Raju consoled them, but they were very anxious because even the river was narrowing. Velan's brother was not sent by the villagers to inform the Swami about the quarrel. He came on his own accord and argued on the subject of quarrel with Swami. He did not have the power of understanding, so the Swami told him to inform the villagers that he would not eat until they were good. When he reached there, the assembly of the village elders was discussing the rains and the fight and were planning a counter attack. Into this assembly, Velan's brother burst. They asked him why he had gone there. He answered foolishly as it was his manner, but told them that the Swami would not take food until it was all right. The villagers thought that the Swami would undertake a fast for rains and were mad with joy. They compared his fast with Mahatma Gandhi's fasts. The villagers came and sat round him in a silent semi-circle. Raju was pretending to read a holy book. Sometimes he made philosophical remarks. They listened to him and said, "Your prayer will surely save the village." There was no escape for him and everyone in the crowd touched his feet. There was a great noise, but their devotion to him was unquestionable. Velan had declared that he was on fast that day and so he could not ask for his food. When Velan arrived at night, Raju asked him, "What makes ou think that I can bring rains?" He told Velan that he was an ordinary man and not a saint. Velan made many protests. When there was no other way to escape the ordeal, he narrated the story of his life to Velan and he listened to him seriously.

Chapter VII

Raju was accepted by Marco as a member of his family. Thus from guiding tourists he concentrated on guiding a single family. Marco was an unpractical man and he had married so that someone might care for him. But his choice was wrong as the girl herself was a dreamer. Thus a hardy man like Raju proved invaluable. Raju started spending much money on his dresses and cosmetics. His expenses were mounting and income was decreasing as the shop was being neglected and was left entirely to the charge of the boy. The only reality in Raju's life at that time was Rosie whose company he wanted at every cost. But he did not want to be observed going to Room No. 28 by the deskman. He was fascinated by the girl, but it was difficult to understand her. Even amidst the caresses, she would free herself and desire to go to her husband. When Raju asked her the reason, she replied that after all he was her husband. Rosie became enamoured of Raju. She thought that with his help she would soon become a great dancer. At five in the morning, she would start her practice of dancing before the figure of Natraj for three hours. Two days later, when Raju went there, he found neither of them at the House. They had gone to the cave, only Joseph was there arranging their dinner. He admired Marco lyrically and said that he was even happier without his wife. Raju offered to take her down hill. With this view he started for the cave and found Marco coming back. Rosie was following a few yards behind him. When Raju addressed them, no one replied. One afternoon when Raju was trying to sleep his mother informed him about someone's arrival. Raju came out. He saw Rosie and was amazed. He did not want anything more. Rosie told Raju that encouraged by Marco's nice tone, she once asked him to see her dance. While Rosie was dancing, Marco stopped her in the middle and said that he did not like the dance. Rosie told him that every one except he admired her dance. When she told Marco that she had danced before Raju who had admired her, he became suspicious of her. Then he decided to leave for Madras. When she also tried to enter the railway compartment, Marco said that he had not purchased ticket for her. The train steamed off and Rosie was left alone at the platform. It was then that she came to Raju's house. Raju did not sit at the railway shop. The boy was pocketing money at the shop. Raju's credit with the wholesalers was going down. Suddenly the railway authorities gave him notice and his shop was given to a new contractor. Raju was greatly pained. In the fit of emotion, he fought with the new contractor.

Chapter VIII

Raju owned a wholesale merchant eight thousand rupees. He came to demand his money. Raju had no money to pay him. The Seth (Sait) filed a criminal suit in the law-court. Raju asked Gaffur to lend him five hundred rupees but Gaffur did not give him any money. Raju's mother called her brother and ultimately the mother left her house and went with her brother saying that she would come only when Rosie left the house. Rosie started practice as a dancer. She now had a new name – Nalini. Rosie showed a full-length dance to the office-bearers of Albert Mission High School. It was very much liked by them. She was now ready for her new career as a professional classical dancer. They agreed and the variety show in the

school was to be adjusted according to the necessity of the dance. She also placed her needs of orchestra and stage-decoration to which also they agreed. Thus Rosie got the drummers and accompanists which she had been clamouring all along. Thus Nalini had the start. Her career as a professional classical dancer began.

Chapter IX

After the dance-show at the Union Function Rosie suddenly found herself famous. Her fame soared rocket-like. Her name became public property. It was not necessary now to introduce Rosie. In fact Raju was known because he went about with her. Rosie became known because she had the genius in her. Raju tried to parade Rosie as much as possible, but always feigned that he wanted to avoid public. It was a world of showmanship till they reached their house where she would give him a passionate hug and say, “Even if I have seven re-births, I won’t be able to pay my debt to you.” Raju used to swell with pride. They ate their dinner prepared by her because she still was doing household duties. The Seth to whom Raju owed a sum of rupees eight thousand managed to secure an attachment of the house before judgement. The lawyer befooled Raju into believing that it was nothing serious. he went to Raju’s mother’s village to secure his mother’s signature. She signed the papers without letting her brother know anything. Raju left the house to be occupied by the Seth once for all. Raju’s mother wrote to Raju saying that she would come to live in her house if Raju was going to live in a new house. Raju put away her letter without a reply. He moved to a new house and forgot about the house and his mother. Although Rosie was very successful as a classical dancer, she was not happy. Rosie (Nalini) was at the height of her career but she was unhappy, even more unhappy than she was when Raju’s uncle used to bully her in the old house. In the whole show Nalini cared for nothing except the jasmine garlands that she received in the end and Raju for the cheque. Whenever Raju was in the town he passed most of his time playing cards with his friends. He had set apart a separate room for the purpose. Marco’s photo appeared in the illustrated weekly. Rosie was very fond of this paper. She saw the photo and came running to Raju. She was very much excited. Raju feigned surprise. He made enquiries about the book although the truth was that he had already received a copy of it sent by Marco. Marco had sent a book to Raju, but Raju did not tell anything about the book to Rosie. When she knew about the book she was very much perturbed about Raju’s action. Raju had forged Rosie’s signature on a letter sent by Marco’s lawyer to get her jewellery box from the bank to be sent to her. After some days the superintendent of police came with a warrant for Raju’s arrest on a complaint from Marco, the charge was of forgery.

Chapter : X

Raju had to spend two days in the lock-up. He was released on bail. Rosie continued to dance to earn money for fighting Raju’s case. Raju was sentenced to jail for two years. In jail Raju was regarded a model prisoner. He worked at the vegetable garden of the Superintendent. He also worked as his personal servant. Mani came to see him in the jail. He informed him that Rosie had left the town for good and settled in Madras. He also told him that

his mother was keeping well in the village. She had watched the last proceedings of the case. The judge sentenced Raju to two year's imprisonment. The lawyer said that ordinarily Raju would have been sentenced to seven year's imprisonment. It was his (the lawyer's) influence that brought down the sentence to two year imprisonment.

Chapter : XI

Raju's story which he was narrating to Velan ended with the crowing of the cock. Velan's respect for Raju did not diminish. He addressed him as 'Swami' and promised that he would not disclose the secret to anyone. It was the fifth day of his fast. People came from all over India to see the Swami. On the tenth day of the fast an American from California came. He was a film maker of a television company. Raju agreed to help him and answer his questions. He set his T.V. camera, generator etc. and began asking Raju questions. Raju said that fasting could abolish all wars and bring in world peace. He championed fasting for everyone. He said that the caste system was going. The American asked him if he had always been a Yogi. Raju answered, "Yes, more or less. On the eleventh day, the last day of the fast, the doctors examined Raju and declared that his condition was serious. They said that Raju should break the fast immediately. With Velan's and two other men's help he went down towards the river. He reached the basin of water. He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain. He began to say his prayers. Velan and another man held him each by an arm. The morning sun was out. Raju opened his eyes, looked about and said, "Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs." So saying Raju fell down and died.

11.4.3 Critical Analysis

The Guide is a story of Raju's sin and repentance as much as the story of everyman's growth from ordinary to the extraordinary, from a petty guide of places to a spiritual guide. The story is divided into two parts. Part one traces the growth of Raju as a child and a youngman who fell in love with an unhappy woman, Rosie, whose sole ambition was to be a distinguished dancer. It closes with Raju's lock-up for forgery. The second part delineates Raju's growth into a Swami after his release from the jail. The strings of the narrative of the first phase are in Raju's hands whereas the novelist himself controls the narrative of the second phase. The movement of the story comprises the rise of Railway Raju into the lover and promoter of Rosie, the dancer and eventual fall on account of forgery, and from the time of release from the jail onward the growth of Raju into a Mahatma. In a way, from the early childhood of Raju to the last day of his life, the story of Raju is the story of a common man's attainment of maturity.

Raju was a true guide. He remains a guide till his end, Whatever the place, position, or time, he would play the guide. He ran away from books; avoided scholars like Marco; and hated to be exact about the place of tourist's interest in Malgudi; but the worst irony of his fate was that he was always teaching or helping others to learn.

The technique of *The Guide* is a feat. The story starts in the middle of the narrative : Raju sitting in the dilapidated temple bored with loneliness of the place. From here onwards the story moves forward and backward dramatising the present while narrating the past.

The language used to narrate the past of Raju is not modest. It is more assertive and egoistic than confessional or pathetic. This is another indirect suggestion made by the novelist to indicate that Raju to the last day of his life was the same old 'Railway Raju', smart, cunning and romantic.

The Guide is a truly Indian novel : images, symbols, manners, habits, attitudes and sentiments, all combine to reinforce the feeling that R.K. Narayan is a true son of the Indian soil. He is a pride of Indian literature.

11.4.4 Picaresque Novel

A picaresque novel is a novel which deals with the adventures of rogues and villains. The word 'picaresque' comes from the spanish word 'Picaro' which means a rogue or a villain. The rogue or picaro is the central figure in a picaresque novel and he plays many roles and wears many masques. Raju is the central figure in R.K. Narayan's novel, *The Guide*. He is a rogue and he plays different roles in the novel till he finally comes to be regarded as a Mahatma in the village Mangal. Towards the end of his life he sacrificed his life for the villages and appears a true Mahatma.

11.4.5 Technique

The technique of narration, Narayan has used in this novel keeps the curiosity of the readers alive, regarding both the past and the present of Raju. It makes the narrative fresh, vigorous and interesting. As the past and the present are cunningly jumbled, there is a constant impression of suspense and anticipation. The zig-zag narration gives a piquancy to the novel without in any way confusing the reader. In this way Raju becomes his own critic. The past and the present are juxtaposed, and each illuminates the others.

6.5 Self Assessment Questions

Answer the following questions in brief :

1. Comment on the beauty of irony in *The Guide*.
2. How do you consider Rosie's irony of fate?
3. How did Raju become a tourist guide?
4. Who was Guffur?
5. What do you know about Marco's book about Mempi-Cave pictures?

6.6 Answers To Self Assessment Questions

1. The beauty of the irony is not in the people raising a criminal to the status of a saint, but rather in the gullibility of even the elite who came to see the Swami on fast from far off places, and in that the area with no water, no food and no jobs suddenly started humming with life.
2. Compared to Raju's Rosie's fate is not very encouraging. For her good looks and for her higher education she succeeded in marrying Marco. His chief interest in marrying Marco was to remove the stigma attached to her name. But the irony of her fate also was that she was to remain a dancer even after marrying Marco, first for her deep-rooted love for dancing and later for circumstantial reasons.
3. He had gained most of his knowledge from Scraps of newspapers, magazines and old books. He had learnt much from his own experience. He never said, "I don't know." It was not in his nature. In spite of his lack of knowledge he became a very successful tourist guide.
4. Gaffur was a taxi-driver. His taxi old and clumsy. However, he plied his taxi on routes on which no other car went. Gaffur and Raju were friends. Raju hired Gaffur's taxi whenever his tourists needed once.
5. Marco wrote a book about the cave paintings he had seen and studied near Malgudi. The book was, titled "The Cultural History of South India". It has a chapter on the Mempi Cave Picture. At the head of the chapter Marco wrote a note saying that the author was obliged to Shri Raju of the Malgudi Railway Station for his help.

11.7 Let Us Sum Up

You have read and understood a contemporary masterpiece of fiction, *The Guide*. You have also read about the literary trends and concepts of twentieth century fiction. The impact of Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals in literary writing has also been understood by you. After going through the material of this Unit and reading the text, you must have developed the capability to read, understand, assess, analyse and evaluate a work of prose writing.

11.8 Review Questions

1. "Velan was bursting with news of a miracle. He stood before Raju with folded hands." What was this news?
2. Why did Rosie marry Marco?
3. Describe how Raju showed a cobra-dance to Rosie.
4. How did Rosie come back to Raju?

5. Why did Rosie change her name to Nalini?
6. How did Raju become famous as a Swami?
7. How did Raju receive visitors at his new house?
8. How did Raju gain Rosie's sympathy in the beginning?
9. Comment on the element of irony and satire in *The Guide*.
10. What does 'temple' symbolise in the fictional world of R.K. Narayan.

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UNIT-12

ANITA DESAI : *VOICES IN THE CITY*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Anita Desai: Her Life and Works
- 12.3 Anita Desai: As a Novelist
- 12.4 About the Age
- 12.5 Summary of The Novel: *Voices in the City*
- 12.6 Critical Analysis
- 12.7 *Voices in the City* as an epic on Calcutta
- 12.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.9 Review Questions
- 12.10 Bibliography

12.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) get an introduction to the novel *Voices in the City*.
- (ii) know about the life and works of Anita Desai.
- (iii) understand the summary of the novel.
- (iv) assess Anita Desai as a novelist.
- (v) evaluate *Voices in the City* as novel.

12.1 Introduction

Voices in the City is a fascinating novel which describes the corrosive effects of city life on an Indian family. The main protagonist, Nirode is brought up in luxury by an over-indulgent mother and he settles down in Calcutta. He becomes absorbed into its bohemian life, while his elder sister, Monisha lives out a servile existence within the rigid limits of a traditional Hindu family. Their younger sister arrives from the country and becomes involved with an artist; but the outcome of this relationship and the dreadful decision of committing suicide that Monisha eventually takes, make this novel a doubly haunting and a consummate

work of art.

In *Voices in the City*, Desai's attempt is ambitious and the canvas she paints is quite wide. Here, instead of one, there are three significantly important characters Nirode, Monisha and Amla - with a number of minor characters and the whole of the city of Calcutta in the background. Despite the number of protagonists, all the four parts of the novel are integrally and functionally related and all highlight the main thematic issues. Structurally, the novel is quite sound.

12.2 Anita Desai: Her Life and Works

Anita Desai is one of the most famous Indo-Anglican fiction writers. She was born of a Bengali father and a German mother in 1937. She started writing when she was just seven. To date she has published eight novels and two collections of short stories besides a number of articles and literary pieces in various journals and periodicals.

She has been a winner of the Winifred Holtby Award for Regional Literature of the Royal Society of Literature, London and of the Sahitya Akademi Award for English for the year 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). She has also received the Award for Excellence in Writing (1979) for her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* from the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Authors Guild of India. Her first novel for children *The Village by the Sea* won her the Guardian Children's Fiction Award in 1982. Anita Desai has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the Sahitya Akademi and has had the distinction of being a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, London.

Besides a number of critical essays and articles, there are some full length studies on Anita Desai's fiction. According to Arts Guardian, London, "Anita Desai is one of the best known and highly regarded novelists working in English in the sub-continent. The style she has evolved is lucid, tight, undramatic..... her imagistic prose acquires ambiguous and terrible, powers the words hold down the events forcibly."

Her Works: (a) Novels: *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, *Clear Light of Day*, *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *In Custody*, *The Village by the Sea*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

(b) Short Stories: *An Examination*, *Cat on a Houseboat*, *Circus Cat*, *Alley Cat*, *Descent from the Roof-top*, *Games at Twilight*, *Ghost House*, *Grandmother*, *How Gentle is the Mist*, *Mr. Bose's Private Bliss*, *Private Tuition by Mr. Bose*, *Surface Textures*, *Tea with the Maharani*, *The Accompanist*, *The Peacock Garden* (A collection of short stories), *To Sell a Picture*.

12.3 Anita Desai : As A Novelist

Anita Desai is one of the most distinguished among the younger set of Indo-English writers. She is one of the best known and highly regarded novelists working in English in the

sub-continent. She has more than half-a-dozen novels and collections of short stories to her credit. She was awarded the Sahitya Akadami Award in 1978 and the Guardian Award in U.K. in 1983. She is an existential novelist.

Anita Desai is not interested so much in showing surface realities in the quest of inner truths lying under the surface level. In an interview she tells Yashodhara Dalmia, "One's pre-occupation can only be a perpetual search-for meanings, for value, for-dare I say it-truth. I think of the world as an iceberg- the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged, make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and the discovery of a private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most-and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol, word and rhythms-to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on chaos."

In her novels Anita Desai makes an attempt to explore this submerged truth through the exploration of the psyche of her characters against her own vision of life which is basically dark. The world for her is full of violence and destruction. Death hovers dangerously over hope and meaning threatening destruction. An individual feels lonely and alienated in this dark world. He is hopeless and in despair, acutely conscious of a sense of worthlessness and absurdity of all objects and patterns around him. Faith in God that could have created some hope in this dark, hopeless world is not sought by Mrs. Desai's intellectual characters. As they have nothing to live for, almost all her characters revolt against the existing patterns of life. But as they do not have anything to fight for, their fight remains halfhearted and ends in failure. Sometimes they do not fight and tend only to withdraw; but to their shock they realise that their attempts are futile because withdrawal is unattainable.

If they try to seek relief in another world-the world of fantasy, it so happens that after entering it they come to realise that it is no better than the world of reality. Thus man is entangled in a maze from which there is no escape. He painfully waits for death which too fails to give any meaning to his waiting.

Though Mrs. Desai basically seems to be saying-the longer one lives the deeper he suffers the bitter attacks of life-yet in her later novels the change to a more positive attitude towards life is noticeable. This might have been the result of her own changing attitude to life caused by her growing maturity.

Desai's "Voices in the City" is based on the life of the middle class intellectuals of Calcutta and it is an unforgettable story of a Bohemian brother and his two sisters caught in the cross-currents of changing social values. In many ways the story reflects a vivid picture of India's social transition-a phase in which the older elements are not altogether dead and the new elements not fully developed.

12.4 About The Age

The term “Indo-Anglican” is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today there are a large number of educated Indians who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Their writing has now developed into a substantial body of literature in its own right and it is this literature which is referred to as Indo-Anglican literature.

While English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indians from earliest times with rare force, eloquence and effectiveness, excellence in the writing of creative prose could be achieved much later than in the writing of verse. But despite its late start, the novel has gone far ahead of poetry both in quantity and quality. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indo-Anglican novel really came to its own. The ideals of the Indian struggle for freedom are reflected in such novels as K.S. Venkataramani’s *Murgan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932). “With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), the novel in English may be said to have come of age. Today the Indian novelists writing in English are large in number. Besides Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, there are also K. Nagarajan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai.” All these novelists, and many more, have considerably enriched Indo-Anglican fiction.

12.5 Summary of The Novel: *Voices in the City*

Voices in the City has a number of different kinds of pairs, but the relationship of all of them is characterised by alienation. In this novel, instead of one, there are three significantly important characters—Nirode, Monisha and Amla—with a number of minor characters and the whole of the city of Calcutta in the background.

Nirode’s mother is a sophisticated, accomplished and beautiful lady. She has an idle drunkard as her husband who married her for financial considerations. As a result, the husband gets satisfaction in thinking ill of his wife and the wife seeks escape and contentment in flowers and gardens. The relationship between Dharma and his wife is based on a kind of passive suffering on the part of his wife to all the controls and impositions of her husband. Monisha is confined behind bars in Jiban’s house and is surrounded by his fat, secure and placid uncles and aunts. She feels no better than a prisoner. She is always tormented by a sense of boredom, monotony and lack of privacy. The love that is “not binding is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind and conscience” is far beyond her reach. Even ordinary communication and understanding found among most of human beings is missing in the relationship of Monisha and Jiban. In her own house she is accused of theft by her in-laws of stealing her own husband’s money and her expectation of help and moral support is shattered by his heartbreaking sentence: ‘Why didn’t you tell me before you took it?’

She makes consistent attempts to withdraw from worldly life and at a later stage she discovers her life to be “traceless, meaningless, uninvolved” which amounts to non-existence. Jiban has learnt to play only one role in his life which is that of a formal, rigid bureaucrat. That is why he fails miserably as husband and is responsible for his wife’s suicide.

Monisha’s younger sister Amla is fascinated by Dharma thinking him to be an ideal artist. She considers him a man capable of understanding not only the conscious physical and spiritual needs of a woman, but also of knowing the subconscious layers of her mind. In the beginning Amla thinks this relationship to be fine and satisfying, but her dream is mercilessly shattered when she comes to know that Dharma is actually a “Self-righteous, blind, unfeeling zealot” who is capable of turning his only daughter out of the house for having done something unnatural and shameful. While turning his daughter out he does not care about his wife and her suffering.

Nirode is the protagonist in the novel. He is a “congenital failure” and his search for freedom is an existential search. He is a rebel and rejects the world of security and routine. Nirode hates routine and wonders how one can spend one’s lifetime on “something that does not matter.” For him it is:

“Better to keep out of the window and end it all instead of smearing his family background, the wealth of his family, everything that may bind him to some kind of routine. He rejects intimacy and wants to be free in his private world, of doubts and questionings,. When his brother Arun departs, he takes a decision and gives up his job and his room in the Y.M. He then plans a magazine which also fails to hold his attention of faith for long. He tells David in this regard:

“I want to fail-quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my net failure. I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom. I want to explore that depth... I want to descend, quickly.”

To this confession David replies, “That is more than defeatism-Nirode it is absolute negation.” It is clear that Nirode wants negation, not acceptance. He does not want to continue for, as he tells David that he feels as if he were born with his heart emptied out. He feels isolated and likes this isolation. He shuts himself up in his world and withdraws from the outside world. He wishes to announce: I am a leper..... leave me, do not come near. I am a leper, diseased with the loneliest disease of all.” He is dissatisfied and disillusioned even with the world of artists and has lost faith in life. To him life is meaningless; it is absurd like the journey of Sisyphus. His magazine “Voice” is a voice in the wilderness failing to build any contact between him and the world. It is a farce and Nirode admits his failure saying “Where was the will to get up, select another ladder and begin the journey of absurdity all over again?..... Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant; equally worthless.”

Nirode rejects both faith and the need for faith which survives only through doubt and

questioning. He fears that one day he may turn to religion but he suppresses any inclination that may have arisen in his mind. After deliberately allowing "Voice" to fail, he begins a play with two characters and only one of them is alive. Nirode reduces his needs to the barest minimum and thus rebels against the imposition of any pattern on his life. During his illness life and death confront each other and when he comes out alive out of it, he has rid himself of this last desire to communicate through art. His bare, weak self which so frightened Moisha, now she notices, has begun to grow another cover:

"I realize..... he has progressed beyond me. Here is a combination of acquiescence and renunciation I have not yet made. Here it is, in this plant gesture, this wind gesture of a weak, invalid hand. Back he goes into the captivity of friendship, concern, criticism and world. Yet he will never again be a part of it as he once was with such passion and anxiety- this gesture has removed it, all to a safe distance from his self."

Later, Nirode explains to Amla that his rejection is not caused by morbidity but by the desire to preserve sanity, ".....at the end of it I realised that the only thing I wanted to protect, what any sane man needs to protect his conscience." He admits that his pursuit of failure has been a mistake because one can't descend to such, complete darkness, such complete isolation, all exposed. That's where one most needs to know one's covering, one's carapace. He denies himself even the consolation of suffering. He quotes from *Camus* to Amla as well as David. He is cautious of love because it makes inroads into man's privacy. He regards marriage as "destructive, negative and decadent." Nirode's rebellion is completed through Monisha's death. The fire which burns her to death acts like a cathartic agent as far as Nirode is concerned. He sees her dead body or what is left of it and his silence is broken and his exile is also ended:

"He seemed unable to remain still or silent, he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again to touch Amla's cold hand when he saw her weep. He pressed them to him with hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching others' flesh, others' pains, longed to make them mingle with his own, which till now had been agonizingly neglected."

Nirode's desire to touch and feel, to be involved with others and to share the sufferings of others is in direct contrast to his earlier dislike of touch and contact. He feels excited as a "religious fanatic is excited by the death..... of a saint." The design of life and death seems suddenly clear to him.

Like Nirode, Monisha wants to be free, but unlike him she finds it difficult to free herself of her rights, privileges and duties. She longs for privacy and solitude and the state of being undisturbed. But it does not happen. Life remains dull to the point of being meaningless. Jiban's posting to Calcutta and Monish's childlessness further make her privacyless. Looking at the women around her, she asks herself:

"Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusion, what solution, what truth falls

into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart?"

Monisha finds her answer in the bleeding doves who carry their suffering with them, but her own options are limited. For her the choice is "between death and mean existence, and that surely is not a difficult choice." Like Gautama, Monish turns to the Gita, for the Gita does not offer a purely religious solution. The wisdom of the Gita recommends detachment and control. But the detachment she achieves, like the detachment of Nirode, is not born out of experience, but out of fear and attachment. They are both afraid of the inroads that love may make into their lives:

"I see now that both Nirode and I shy from life, fear it as attachment, for 'from attachment arises longing.....' If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind or conscience, then-but there is no such love. It is not there in my relationship with Jiban, which is filled only by loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed, and once plunged me into the most calamitous pleasures and pains, fears and regrets, and never again will it possess me. Nor is it there in my relationship with mother which is filled with an inbred and invalid sense of duty, of honour, of concern....But I do not mean these physical passions and congenital connections at all- I mean by love only an awake condition of the conscience. I fear this and avoid it."

Thus the kind of love Monisha wants is not available to her. "Jiban destroys whatever meaning their relationship might have had. When she is accused of being a thief, Jiban, instead of accepting her right to the money, questions it: "He did not say 'Why you did not tell them at once?' 'Why didn't you tell me before you took it?"

She withdraws from the material concerns of the family and the world, and retreats behind the barred windows. From behind these barred windows she advises Amla to go in the opposite direction. In other words, it is advice to rebel. Amla notices her stillness and deathlike submission to everything and thinks of her as a lifeless statue. But Monisha's stillness is not steadiness or detachment. It is not even feeling or suffering- it is a deathlike stillness. While watching the dancer in the street, Monisha feels strangely untouched. It shows she has become totally unconcerned. She alone stands apart "unnaturally cool, too perfectly aloof, too inviolably whole and alone and apart." She suddenly becomes conscious of having lost all right to exist-and gives up the quest too soon. Her victory over her mind is less important than the instinctive surrender of the other women to their feelings of sorrow and sympathy. Monisha's fear of touch and intimacy, her withdrawal from passion and its display put her in her own private prison. She is aware of this:

"I am different from them all. They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me."

"What a waste, what a waste it has been. This life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer, and so imperfect, so handicapped an observer at that. Why do I stand

here, watching and listening, unable to understand a single word or gesture, each one of which moves my companions nearly to tears? If they wanted me, if they cried out that they were drowning, or burning, or dying of disease, I would not hear them. If they reached out for my hand, I could never receive their fingers, hold their palms: there would be this sheet of glass, of metal between us. I have not given birth, I have not attended death. All the intervening drama has gone by, unwound itself like a silent, blurred film that has neither entertained, nor horrified me. It has unwound itself and now there is nothing. Oh, yes, there is this street, there are many people, one of whom is singing. But if a great fog were to roll across the scene, or a terrible cyclone to snatch it all away and scatter it upon the sea like so much flotsam, it would be all the same to me. I should remain alone, apart and enclosed within myself beyond their touch....”

Monisha’s suicide is an attempt to rebel against this meaningless, deathlike isolation in life. It is an attempt to give meaning to her death; for her life has been meaningless. Her suicide is preceded by self-knowledge through suffering and it asserts her freedom. Between suicide and meaningless existence, it is an exercise of her choice.

Monish’a sister Amla is very different from both Nirode and Monisha and finds their stillness and withdrawal mystifying. But gradually she too finds in life a sense of hollowness and futility which destroy her interest and vitality as well as her sense of usefulness. She loses her sense of camaraderic:

“Lassitude overcame her like a fever, weighing against her temples, making her rest her elbows on the table and her head droop over unfinished work. It seemed to her that the coffee always came to her cold. It seemed to her that her colleagues smoked too many of their ostentatiously cheap cigarettes; that Jaya and Abhay made too much of their ‘star-crossed lovers’ attitude and that, in reality, they relished it; that Dada was merely a garrulous day-dreamer who had carried his daydreams too far, too close to the region of nightmares; that Adil was spineless and despicable. It seemed to her that Mrs. Basu was a queen of unscrupulous commerce, that her clients were sharks and liars, that the round babies she drew got no benefit whatever from the gripewater she was advertising, that she was involved in a shady and unconscientious organisation, business and art. She thought her drawings were awful. She thought the summer was never going to end.”

Amla’s relationships with Aunt Lila became somewhat tense when she tends to be secretive about her thoughts and finally falls in love with Dharma, a married man much older than her. She is in need of communication and reciprocation with someone. But her dream of love and involvement is broken when she comes to know that Dharma has disowned and turned out his daughter. She understands the inhuman power that love wants to exercise and she has courage enough to bid farewell to this love which began to overpower her:

“Like the unchanted maiden of love, she had willingly let herself be lured. She had revelled in the enchantment, been grateful for its joy. What was it now that made her jump to her feet, hurry to say farewell he had predicted, rush through the door to the wide and well-

known world again? Perhaps a scarlet surge of family blood, always as bright and quick and responsive in her as in her brother and sister. Or the realisation that the chalkline of division had been drawn between her and Dharma, and to defy and cross it would mean, as in some half-understood ritual of black magic, destruction. Or the newly imposed sense of Gita Devi on the other side of the wall, praying her prayers in her kitchen temple of polished brass and incense, braziers and hibiscus, whom Dharma was bound, by his inhuman act of rejecting their joint child, to shield and protect from further distress and possible insanity. Gita Devi appeared now to Amla as the base of all Dharama's actions, the spread lotus that bore the weight of the god absorbed in his meditation and the spinning out of his 'Karma.' A combination of all these revelations and inspirations filled her, expanded her, made her rise and float, and on its drift she left the house, feeling as emptied out, frangible and exhausted as if a high fever had drained her."

In the end of the novel, Amla talks of Kali as the mother of Bengal and assures Nirode that he is alive and he will stay alive. Nirode replies, "Ah yes, but only as long as she please to see me breathe and live. I know why I'm living, at last, I know now where I'm going - towards her, towards her. She (Monisha) is waiting."

"They halted and stood, trembling, listening to the sounds of a procession that wound through the city at that very hour, chanting the goddess's name and beating of drums. Close about them fell silence, and they turned to look back at the big house behind the shrubs. It was unlit, it seemed uninhibited, one sleeping mass against the soft, misty sky that was tinted a livid pink by the lights of the city burning beneath it. Then they saw a white figure step out on to the upper Veranda, stand silently at the rail, and watch them."

12.6 Critical Analysis

Chapter-I

The first part deals with the protagonist, Nirode, who is a bohemian artist. The description of Nirode's personality and character is hardly convincing. It is because of the language used by the novelist. Nirode remains unconvincing and the reader is unmoved. Nirode's experiences concerning different vocations and aspects of life remain at the level of statement and reportage, and his psychic turbulence seems to be unreal. The reader does not identify himself with Nirode and does not feel involved in them because the language seems artificial and does not give impression of reality. It does not show that this attitude is an intrinsic part of Nirode's personality. Nevertheless, some parts of this section like Arn's departure for higher studies etc. are dramatically touching and effective owing to effective handling of the language.

Chapter-II

The second part- 'Monisha' views the meaninglessness of life from female point of view. It is comparatively more concrete and appealing than the first part, owing to the better

harmony between theme and its expression. The creation of the atmosphere of the Bow-Bazar house and the use of a few significant symbols like the barred windows and the bleeding heart doves are quite effective. At times the expression of Monisha's helpless and hopeless, pitiable and miserable condition in her husband's middle-class joint family is touching. Like part one sometimes this also tends to be a statement on meaninglessness, drudgery, lack of privacy, alienation and detachment and loses some of its impact.

Chapter-III

Part three- 'Amla' seems to be the most satisfying and convincing part of the novel. Anita Desai employs the dramatic and symbolical mode in this section. While the changes in Amla's relations with Dharma have been depicted in terms of paintings, her realisation concerning the triviality and artificiality of life in Calcutta comes alive through the dramatic presentation of the party at the Basus. The deep revelation concerning violence and death is brought to her effectively through the symbolical presentation of the events occurring at the racecourse.

Chapter-IV

In the fourth and concluding part the merger of mother with Kali takes place and its thematic significance is quite evident. Anita Desai's attempt at presenting the locale i.e. the city of Calcutta, as a force in the novel has been fairly successful. The profusely strewn images of dirt, squalor, poverty, disease and suffering create the required atmosphere for rendering absurdity of existence. However, the language seems to be deficient in presenting the interactions between the place and the characters. The language gives the impression of being artificial and imposed. There is poetic element in the novel in terms of its language which is poetic prose and verse lines also. But its main characters, viz. Nirode and Monisha do not take interest in the beauty and rhythm of life. In part three 'Amla', no doubt there is some scope for poetic expression and that is why the language of this section is more poetic.

Themes

(a) the theme of alienation-In the novel, the theme of alienation has been treated also in terms of mother-children relationship-another aspect of interpersonal relations. Nirode hates reading his mother's letters and even uses filthy, abusive words for her. Monisha finds her relationship with mother "filled with an inbred and invalid sense of duty, of honour of concern." In the end of the novel Nirode identifies his mother with goddess Kali-the goddess of death in a philosophical way.

(b) The theme of death-The theme of death is not quite immediate and haunting, but it significantly recurs and casts its morbid shadow on all objects and patterns and presents life as a meaningless journey. While at times it runs parallel with life, at others it seems to merge with life itself and becomes an inseparable part of it. The merger of Kali with mother is an example of that. Monisha's death transforms Nirode from a rebel and a non-conformist to a person deeply involved and concerned with others.

(c) Theme of Violence-In the novel, violence has been depicted as a characteristic of the general behaviour of the people and a part of the atmosphere. It is a hidden force ready to erupt at the slightest touch: “In Calcutta, it is everywhere. Deceptively it is a quiet crowd-passive but distressed. This violence is symptomatic of the diseased state of the psyche and the poisonous atmosphere.

(d) Theme of City Life-Monisha withdraws because of the monotony and boredom of life, the lack of privacy and absence of pure love. Nirode withdraws mainly because of the meaninglessness of life: “He loathed the world that could offer him no crusade, no pilgrimage and he loathed himself for not having the true, unwavering spirit of either within him.” Some impersonal forces like locale also make Desai’s characters withdraw from life or to react to it in a particular way. In this novel, Calcutta is made to serve not only as a proper background against which meaninglessness and absurdity can be explored, but it has been made to function as a force and an agent that renders life meaningless. The sordid, ghastly, monstrous force of Calcutta is identified with the goddess Kali.

Among other features are the use of fantasy, imagery and Indianism in the novel. Fantasy finds an expression in the art of Anita Desai. All the protagonists indulge in fantasising. Besides, fantasy exists at the level of imagery and language. There tends to be an abundance of images and symbols in the novel which are directly related to death. Calcutta is described as the “devil city”, “the monster city”, the city of “odorous mortality”. The destructive force of Calcutta has been realised through profusely scattered images of dirt, squalor, misery, pain, poverty and disease, which depict the disgusting, nauseating city and seem to render life lived there worthless. “This city lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality”.

Images have profusely been used in the novel to portray different psychic states of characters. The imagery expresses Nirode’s nonconformist life styles. The dress he wears is “too big for him and worn thin, hanging loosely as shrouds upon his bony frame”. The house he lives in is “a corrugated iron shack someone erected on his roof-top to house his pigeons”. Images of trains and journeys express withdrawal from life in the novel. Nirode does not undertake any journey in reality, but the images of trains significantly recur in the novel, supported by the images of ships, boats and birds flying in the sky. All of them symbolise Nirode’s wish to withdraw from the meaningless world.

As in the novels of other Indo-English writers, in Desai’s *Voices in the City* there is abundant use of Indianisms. Among them are “Kalyani di”, ‘Saris’ ‘Pan’ etc. Desai employs Indian myths like the myth of goddess Kali in this novel. Prof. Bose tells Nirode a fable from the Panchtantra. Then there is an extract from the Gita which is quoted for judging the quality of Nirode’s detachment and his capacity to act without caring for result. The description of the locale also roots *Voices in the City* to the Indian scene.

12.7 *Voices In The City As An Epic On Calcutta*

Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* has the city of Calcutta in the background. In fact, Calcutta is the locale in the novel and emerge as a character in its own right. Calcutta is made to serve not only as a proper background against which meaninglessness and absurdity can be explored, but an attempt has been made to make it function as a force and an agent that renders life meaningless. Hence Calcutta transcends the role of a locale against which the theme is presented and becomes a force, a theme in itself. Meena Belliappa remarks in this regard:

“In *Voices in the City* an attempt is made, perhaps for the first time, to relate the subjective world of individual to the spirit of a locale. The effort is to project place not only as milieu, but as a force wielding influence on the emotional being of men. In this it is different from some attempts in Indian fiction at individualising places..... for instance, *Kanthapura* as a typical rural community convulsed by the freedom movement; or *Malgudi* as a step from the rural to the urban, affirming traditional values in the face of evil resulting from urban conditions of living. *Kanthapura* or *Malgudi* is a way of life, which imperceptibly shapes the attitudes of characters and decides the manner of their interaction. But Calcutta is much more: it is a complex experience disturbing in its import. The characters who come within its range of influence react directly to it, whereas the ethos of *Kanthapura* or of *Malgudi* is something perceived only by their creators. What is new in Anita Desai is the effort to delineate a sensitivity to locale as it operates within the consciousness of her characters.”

Amla feels she belongs to Dharma's world and in the city she is only an observer, that “She could never truly inhabit it.” Her mother moved away, Dharma had moved away, but Nirode and Monisha continue to live in it. In Dharma's opinion Calcutta is a dead city:

“To me, it is dead and I do not return to visit a tomb. I see the lights going out one by one, all those faint, ineffectual blue gas flares that line the streets, I see it sinking inch by inch into the marsh. The river is sitting up: ships will not come in much longer. The old mansions are crumbling away, and all those eyeless marble nymphs. One day they will burn the last tram, hurl the last brick and then even the mob will fall away. Business will dwindle. Artists will begin to drift away from their filthy heaven and die before they get away from it. And then, my friend, where will Calcutta be?”

But Bose feels Dharma can never really tear himself away from Calcutta, he needs its air and earth. Dharma's house was in Bow Street where Monisha's in-laws also live. Monisha misses privacy and solitude in this city of crowds and beggars. In Calcutta she is weary of the deceptively quiet crowds, of the hidden violence, the anger which reveals itself in murder and crime, in trams being burnt and bonfires being lit all over the city. It is volatile in spirit and response.

Monisha has her own relationship with the city, which happens to be a dark, nightly phenomenon, which allows her to forget the crowd and turn to the sky, to forget the walls and

look at the stars. Monisha addresses it:

“Do you hear me, city of Calcutta? City of Kali, Goddess of Death. Not one word from you, I said, not a sound. No shriek, no groan, no cry. I come here for silence, my few moments of night silence, so cease your moaning and wailing a while... Thank you. Now leave me to the sky. Leave me to gather the stars, frosty and distant and cool.”

The city of Calcutta has many faces viewed by various characters in the novel. It is aware of the colonial hangover in Calcutta, of the Anglicised influences, of the English companies and the world of commerce, its night life. The Bohemian artist like Nirode paints the landscape of the city with its:

“Countless wires, telegraph poles, chimneys, pigeon-roosts - one vast tangled net of the Bangali loquaciousness, the Bengali's quick emotion and fluency, the natural anarchism, his imbalance and inconsistencies, his dark and demoniac dreams that grovelled mostly in the grossness of the city, its shapeless, colourless and grim old houses and slums.”

Amla soon begins to react to the oppressive atmosphere of the city. The harshness of the city has destroyed her eager, adolescent enthusiasm transforming it into cynicism. In the hot summer heat she regretfully asks herself the question, “Why ever did I come to Calcutta? Why didn't I stay away, in Bombay, or go home to Kalimpong?”

The Sordid, ghastly, monstrous force of Calcutta is identified with the goddess Kali. It preys upon people, renders their lives worthless and finally swallows them up totally. At the end of the novel we see that Monisha gets swallowed up by Calcutta, while Nirode is under the torture of being the next in turn. In the beginning Amla, one of the gayest characters ever created by Anita Desai, is quite excited to reach Calcutta and “to drive through Dalhousie Square with all its gingerbread houses, their domes and cupolas and pigeons.” She loves driving also into Ballygunge and seeing its “weather-beaten old mansions and palm trees.” But the dark, devilish force of

Calcutta does not take long to make Amla realise that “this monster city.... lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life, but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality.” Hence, she soon declares : “This City, this city....conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, doesn't it?”

Calcutta is a dead city, but like the phoenix it comes back to life every now and then. At times it is like an explosive, at others it is hot and closed. But it attracts people, outsiders and newcomers, and takes them into its rough arms. It is city with a past, with years and years of history and tradition. It features in Nirode's play, where it is aptly used to pose the question, “What is reality?”

No other city has as much influence or identity as Calcutta. No wonder it is a character in its own right in the novel, which is an epic on Calcutta.

12.8 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we understood

- the corrosive effects of city life on an Indian family
- the strains in family relationship and outside
- Anita Desai as a novelist

12.9 Reivew Questions

1. Write the summary of the novel *Voices in the City* in brief.
2. Discuss the life and works of Anita Desai.
3. Draw the character sketch of Nirode.
4. Write a note on the plot-construction of the novel.
5. How is the novel related to Calcutta?
6. Discuss Anita Desai as a novelist with special reference to her novel - *Voices in the City*.
7. *Voices in the City* is an epic on the present day Calcutta. Discuss.
8. Write a critical appreciation of the novel *Voices in the City*.

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UNIT-13

SHASHI DESHPANDE : *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 An Acquaintance with the Indian Novel in English
- 13.3 About the Novelist and Her Themes
- 13.4 A Detailed Analysis of '*The Dark Holds No Terror*'
- 13.5 Feminist Narratology
- 13.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.7 Review Questions
- 13.8 Bibliography

13.0 Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to present to you a detailed analysis of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Besides, you shall also know about the Indian novel in English, the novelist Shashi Deshpande's career and her contribution to Indian English fiction.

13.1 Introduction

Shashi Deshpande's first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), presents an unusual character, Sarita, who defies her mother to become a doctor, defies her caste to marry outside, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. Sarita and Manu had made a love marriage, but something soon went wrong. He is a failure and she has to earn bread and butter for the family. Her liason with Boozie means nothing since he is after all impotent, but it gives a vicious sadistic twist to Manu's relations with her. She escapes for a while to her parental home, and her mother's curse echoes still, and the ghost of the past will not leave her in peace. She strips herself of her self – deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusions, and Shashi Deshpande's language itself flickers like a candle, and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children, or the sick needing her expert attention; and so she decides to face her home again. Even the world of total despair can open up a new spring of self-confidence.

13.2 An Acquaintance with the Indian Novel in English

Before presenting to you a detailed analysis of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, it will be

proper to acquaint you with the journey that Indian novel in English has travelled.

Indo-Anglian Novel

While English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indians from earliest times with rare force, eloquence and effectiveness, excellence in the writing of creative prose could be achieved much later than in the writing of verse. But despite its late start, the novel has gone far ahead of poetry both in quantity and quality. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indo-Anglian novel really came to its own. The ideals of the Indian struggle for freedom are reflected in such novels as K.S. Venkataramam's *Murugan The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932) "With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the novel in English may be said to have come of age. Today the Indian novelists writing in English are large in number. Besides *Mulk Raj Anand*, *Raja Rao* and *R.K. Narayan*, the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, there are also *K. Nagarajan*, *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, *Manohar Malgonkar*, *Khushwant Singh*, *Balachandra Rajan*, *Kamala Markandaya* and *Anita Desai*." All these novelists, and many more, have considerably enriched Indo-Anglian fiction.

(a) Its Peculiar Problems. The Indian novel made such a late start because, in the beginning, it had to face a number of peculiar problems. One of the most difficult problems which had to be faced was the problem of language. The Indian writer in English must evolve a language flexible and varied enough to suit different fictitious characters drawn from most varied professions and strata of society, as well as Indian enough to create the impression of versimilitude and authenticity. He must also create an Indian atmosphere. *Mulk Raj Anand* has tried to solve the problem of medium by Indianisation of English words, by literal translation into English of Indian expressions, proverbs, etc., and the result has not always been a happy one. Raja Rao has more successfully solved this problem. He does not write Baboo English, but successfully transmutes into English, the idiom, the rhythm and the tone of the natural speech of his characters. He thus achieves an Indian idiom with its distinct echo of regional speech without, however, lapsing into vulgarisms. Other Indian novelists in English have solved, and are trying to solve, this problem in their own way, so that their language may become a suitable medium for the expression of the emotional and intellectual life of Indians. R.K. Narayan, for example, writes "admirably clean English", an English which he finds serves his purpose admirably. It is perfectly adapted to communicate Indian sensibility.

The Indian novelist in English, in other words, "must evolve an Indian English before he can achieve any single success". Prof. V.K. Gokak defines Indian English as, "the evolution of a distinct standard - a standard the body of which is correct English usage, but whose soul is Indian in colour, thought and imagery, and now and then, even in the evolution of an Indian idiom which is expressive of the unique quality of the Indian mind while conforming to the 'correctness' of English usage. It is illustrative of a special type of language phenomenon: a language foreign to the people who use it but is accepted by them because of political and, recently, cultural reasons. In other words good Indian English, is simply good English. English

that differs little in vocabulary and idiom from good English as written in New York or London, so that it brings out the inwardness of Indian life and literature.” Such an English is being successfully evolved by the Indian novelists writing in English.

Another peculiar problem that faces the Indian novelist in English is that of creating an Indian consciousness. Novels in English are likely to command a market not only in India, but all over the English speaking world. Hence, he must project an image of India and her culture, which is authentic and national, rather than distorted, narrow and regional. He must overcome his regional loyalties, and project his vision of the cultural and national identity of India which is sincere and truthful. The problem is further complicated by the cultural changes that have taken place as a result of the impact of the West. Writes C. Paul Verghese in this connection, “The dynamics of her contemporary evolution *vis-a-vis* her traditions, and the realities of her modern life naturally are reflected in the novels written in modern India. Consequently, the Indian novelist faces the problem of giving artistic expression to the effect of economic changes and industrialisation on the community, the class structure, the old relations among occupations and professions and above all in family ties.” Cultural contact and cultural change must be faithfully expressed by the Indo-Anglian novelists.

Still another peculiar problem arises from the fact that the novel in English has an all-India character, and is likely to be read even beyond national borders. Hence, the novelist tends to explain regional customs, rites and ceremonies for readers in other parts of the country, and Indian customs, traditions; rites and ceremonies, for readers outside India. Often such explanations stand out of the context, strike a jarring note, and become a serious artistic fault. Such explanations are certainly necessary, but they should be made an integral part of the story. They should be justified by their context. The novelist cannot ignore the reader. He must remember that he is often not present on the scene, and that artistic success lies in making him see it. Explanatory details are, therefore, unavoidable, but they must be carefully and skillfully woven into the fabric of the total design. This problem has, however, been more successfully solved than the other ones. “Not only Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan but also lesser writers like Kamala Markandaya in her *Nectar in a Sieve* and Menon S. Marath in his *The Wound of Spring* have successfully solved this problem. In their works, the successful weaving of such details into the total texture creates a delicious illusion of reality.

(b) **Its Themes** : Today, the themes of the Indo-Anglian novel are many and varied, K. B. Vaid, commenting on the themes of the Indian novelist, says that his thematic preoccupations are: ‘portrayal of poverty, hunger and disease ; portrayal of widespread social evils and tensions; examination of the survivals of the past; exploration of the hybrid culture of the dislocations and conflicts in a tradition- ridden society under the impact of an incipient, half-hearted industrialization’ (*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 26, 1963). Some other themes of the novel in English are inter-racial relations, the Indian national movement and the struggle for freedom (Raja Rao, *Kanthapura*), partition of India and the death, destruction and suffering caused by it (*Train to Pakistan*). “Depiction of hunger and poverty of Indians (Bhabani Bhattacharya *So Many Hungers*), Indian rural life (Venkataramani, *Murugan*, *The*

Tiller), conflict between tradition and modernity (Rama Mehta : *Inside the Haveli*), continue to engage the attention of the novelist. The theme of the confrontation of the East and the West has been successfully dealt with by *Raja Rao, Balachandran Rajan, Kamala Markandaya* and many others. The younger novelists display an increasing inwardness in their themes. The themes of loneliness, of rootlessness, the exploration of the psyche and the inner man have been dealt with by Anita Desai in her two latest novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* and by Arun Joshi in his *The Foreigner*.

(c) **Its Variety and Vitality** : The Indian novel in English is thus characterised by a variety of themes and techniques. It continues to change and grow, and adapt itself to the changing Indian environment, Social, political, technological and industrial changes have brought corresponding changes in its substance. However, in the field of characterisation the Indian novelist in English has not been quite so successful. With some exceptions his characters continue to be stereotypes. The problem of creating 'round', three dimensional figures, has not been successfully tackled so far. Even novelists, like Mulk Raj Anand, despite all their psychological insights, are deficient in this all-important aspect of the art of a novelist. As K.B. Vaid points out, many Indian novelists have failed to create adequately individualized characters. Further, the novelist even today is sometime carried away by the lure of creating the image of romantic and glamorous India, the India of Rajas and Maharajas, and of mystic saints and sadhus who can achieve miracles. (The Illustrated weekly of India 1963). Thus, Anand in his *Private Life of a Prince* and Malgonkar in his *The Princes* portray the splendours of royal life during its last days, and Kamala Markandaya in her *Possession* presents a weird picture of a mysterious India. Such novels distort reality and the novelist must guard himself against this danger.

13.3 About the Novelist and Her Themes

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, India. She graduated in Economics from Bombay; she then moved to Bangalore, where she attained a degree in Law. The earlier part of her married life was devoted to the care of her two young sons.

She is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada playwright, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre.

She took a course in journalism and worked on a magazine for a time. Her writing career began in 1970 with short stories which later on developed to novel writing. Her first collection of short stories. *The Legacy*, published in 1972, is now prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University. Other collection of short stories are, *The Miracle, The Intrusion and Other Stories*. The novels that go to her credit are *Roots and Shadows*, published by Orient Longmans, which won the Thirumathi Rangammal prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-1983; *The Dark Holds No Terrors* which has been translated into German and Russian; *If I Die Today; Come Up and Be Dead; The Binding Vine; A Matter of Time; Small Remedies* and *That Long Silence* which brought her into the limelight as it was published

by the British Feminist Publishing House, Virago and won Sahitya Academy Award for her.

Shashi Deshpande holds a unique position among the contemporary Indian writers in English. Her books deal with the Indian middle class women's turmoils, convulsions and frustrations and their silence as a means of communication. After going through her works, we derive the conclusion that women, after attaining all types of rights, are now struggling to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional world. As Brigitte Bardot says :

“Women get more unhappy the more they try to liberate themselves.”

Deshpande mirrors the society as it is. Her portrayal is quite unique i.e. she neither represents the old, orthodox image, nor a modern westernized woman, she is the “every woman” of the Indian middle class society, who tries hard to rise above tradition but is involuntarily adapted into it.

The principal themes that have found expression in Shashi Deshpande's novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, parentchild relationship, and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, she is greatly fascinated by the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman. She deals with the inner working of the female psyche and psychological tensions that women undergo.

Though she represents women, writes for them, yet she cannot be marginalized as a feminist writer. She “makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles”.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed a realistic picture of contemporary middle - class woman. She is fascinated by the social forces at work in society, very deftly she has outlined them in her works: the clash between the old and the new; between idealism and pragmatism.

In Deshpande's novels, the protagonist is always a woman, occupying the central space in the novel. In the beginning, the woman is unconventional one, but in the course of time she discovers herself and finds a solution to her problems through adjustment with the tradition. Like a specialist, Deshpande deals with the conflicting phases, underlying reasons confronted by her characters and to some extent suggests a way out of it.

Shashi Deshpande has rendered an authentic treatment to the changed psychological realities of Indian life after Independence. She has created the most interesting neurotic characters. Neurosis is caused by repression of one's feelings and desires as they are not in accordance with the accepted norms of society. In tradition-bound Indian society, women are denied opportunities for open expression of their true feelings. Thus, Indian woman has a tendency towards introspection.

Shashi Deshpande has minutely dealt with the recent phenomenon of educated earning wife and adjustment or maladjustment in the family. She concludes that despite attaining all types of rights, women are struggling to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional

society.

Her major purpose in delineating women's lives is to raise awareness about their predicaments so that they are better able to understand and adapt to their circumstances. Her protagonists follow the torturous route of self-examination and self-realization. No social structures are changed and no changes are visible in the private sphere of home in her fictional world. Deshpande follows the narrative mode of social realism and her avowed interest is in limiting her-self to small social landscapes, specially that of either joint or a nuclear family, and her preference is for the first person narration. What is striking is that grooved within this narrow confine, she so alters her narrative strategies to give us novel formulations of feminism.

Shashi Deshpande has been influenced by some English writers like Margaret Drabble, Dorris Lessing, Erica Jong, Bronte Sisters and Jane Austen. She is inspired by Simon De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer.

Most of her compositions are endowed with an autobiographical note. She hails from a middle - class family, and so do most of her heroines. She was greatly attached to her father, and this same tendency has been depicted in her protagonists. Though her principal subject is always a woman and her problems, she denies to be a feminist. She considers it normal for a woman writer to feel the bitterness with the same pungency as felt by her female counterparts. The themes on which she has worked with dexterity are oppression of woman in a patriarchal society, an intense quest for identity and asserting self - hood, or the protagonist's inward growth acknowledging oneself responsible for one's own repressed state. There is a sustained presentation of failed marriages, questioning the functioning of marriages. The psychological repression comes to surface which is caused by male supremacist ideology which ruins mutual love and concern, corrodes the woman's self- esteem and destroys her sense of identity. In her fiction, Deshpande represents marriage as an institutionalized form of domination over women by men. She concentrates intensely and elaborately on a network of male repression. With a pragmatic and practical approach, she deals with the everyday reality of a woman's repressed existence.

In Deshpande's novels, the plot begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists and ultimately their endeavour to surrender to the traditional roles. Her women seem to rebel in the beginning; towards the end she adjusts to norms of patriarchal culture of Indian society.

13.4 A Detailed Analysis of *The Dark Holds No Terror*

What follows in this section is a detailed analysis of *The Dark Holds No Terror*. You are, however advised to go through the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* first and then read the following description. The page numbers given in the bracket are from the 1980th edition of *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

The Dark Holds no Terrors is the first novel of Shashi Deshpande published in 1980.

It presents the realities of life while dealing with the educated, middle class, career woman. In the novel, there is powerful portrayal of one woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs. It is the story of Sarita and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita, often referred to as Saru, who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother; she is deprived of parental love and affection. Even her birthdays go unnoticed by whereas her brother's birthdays are celebrated in a ceremonial way. The indifference with which she is treated is intolerable for her. She recalls the naming ceremony of her brother:

“They had named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone.” (152)

When her younger brother drowns to death accidentally, she is held responsible for it, particularly by her mother. Being a child herself she could not save him. But her mother always curses her for her son's death. The words followed her for days, months, years, all her life:

“You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, When he is dead?” (191)

Saru could feel her mother's embittered feelings for herself which pierced her:

“I can only remember that she cursed me as no mother should.” (25)

Her mother's constant scolding and negligence for Saru received in turn hatred and indifference from her. She never reconciled with Saru, neither did she forgive her. Saru wonders if she really had killed her brother. Much later she realizes, after much pondering that her brother's death was an accident.

Saru grows up and educates herself against her mother's wishes. Her mother never favoured her education. As a grown up and educated lady, she can reason and question. She cannot endure her mother's indifference towards her. She poignantly feels the unequal treatment between brother and sister. Her brother was given a special treatment and it was as if love and affection were reserved only for him.

The mother is very much attached to her son. Her attitude is typically orthodox and traditional. A male child is given more importance over a girl as he will propagate the family lineage. Moreover the soul of a dead person attains moksha when given 'agni' by his/her son only otherwise the soul wanders in forment. In Hindu families, only a son is entitled to give 'agni' to his dead parents and perform their 'Shradh'. When Saru received the news of her mother's demise, the first thought which occurred to her, is:

“Who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her.

Dhruva had been seven when he died.” (17)

Saru felt insecure in her parental home. Her mother's discriminatory behaviour pricked her. As she grows up, hatred and resentment make her leave home. Though opposed by her mother, she joins a medical college to seek self-identity and freedom and prove her existence

to her mother. For her parents she was a burden:

“Is that all I am, a responsibility?” (144)

It is a traditional belief that after marrying off daughters, parents are relieved of their duties towards their daughters. The negligent attitude of Saru’s parents towards her and her mother’s lot motivate her to achieve success and distinction in life:

“To get married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but damnable.” (140)

She detested the idea of being a typical housewife. She sets her heart upon to do something which would make her feel distinct and superior. These feelings indicate the impact of feminism and modern thinking.

There in medical college, she finds a lover in a college mate. His origin from lower caste is no barrier for her. Thus, revolting against her parents, she marries him. Her mother, being an old, traditional, orthodox woman, could not accept this fact that her daughter being married to a person from a lower caste:

“What cast is he? I don’t know. A Brahmin? of course, not. Then, cruelly..... his father keeps a cycle shop. Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?” (96)

Sarita runs away and marries a person of her liking. The underlying reasons which influenced her decision are — contempt and grudge which she bore against her parents and the need for someone who could satiate her thirst for love which she so much lacked in her life. For her, marriage to Manu is a means of that love and security which she craved for:

“I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.” (35)

On attaining youth and womanhood, Saru always fancied of being possessed by an adoring superior male. For her Manu is the ideal romantic hero who is going to shower her life with love, affection and warmth:

“I was all female and dreamt of being adored and chosen of a superior, superhuman male.” (53)

Saru’s mother resented this marriage and never forgave her. She didn’t even call Saru when she was on her death-bed.

Sarita achieves success by accomplishing herself as an eminent and prestigious doctor. She is happy with her career but simultaneously her marriage begins to crumble under the load of success in her profession. At this point situation reverses. Till now, “he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband.” (37) No doubt, Saru has established herself as a successful doctor but she has to pay a heavy price for it- her family life is upset. She hardly gets time for her family. Her busy schedule keeps her away from

fulfilling her duties towards her husband and children. Her husband, Manu, cannot bear people greeting her and ignoring him. It hurts his male ego and he feels humiliated and slighted. Suppressing his feelings, irritably he says: "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon." The ardent lover in Manu vanishes: he becomes sarcastic towards her, filled with gall and bitterness. Saru senses it: "now I know that it was there it began this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage." The harsh reality occurs to her- it is on attraction and need, not on love that the man-woman relationship is based and she starts hating the same:

"Love. . . . how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely. turning into the thing they called "love". It's only a word she thought. Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away." (65)

Previously Manu was proud of his doctor wife and he used to show off among his friends. "It was the day I saw him showing off something complacency at having shown off a prized possession, his wife. 'A lady doctor.'" (158) But now it was unendurable for him the recognition which his wife was receiving and he being neglected. Sarita herself is also adversely affected by her success. It has placed her in an awkward situation. Love and intimacy disappears from her life; instead there crops up psychological conflict. Her late night working hours deprive children of proper love and care from their mother. Her husband, too, is neglected. A vacuum develops in her married life which was once filled with love and warmth. Manu was employed as a lecturer, where as Saru, a well established doctor was earning more than him. During an interview, he was asked, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well?"

Malice, which had built up in him, is triggered against his wife. A male can never accept the idea of a wife superior to him. His attitude towards her undergoes a drastic change. Previously Saru was extremely happy with her husband. She craved for love and he asserted it through act of sex. But now she being held in high esteem as a lady doctor, it caused a breach in their conjugal relationship. He coiled within himself, unable to get on with this unequal relationship.

Saru ponders:

"Perhaps there is something in the male, that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, yet hold something of her in reserve." (85)

It is a female characteristic to bear domineering attitude where as a male loses himself under domination. Here Manu's sardonic behaviour has been referred to which is an unconscious reaction to Saru's successful career. He becomes a victim of inferiority complex which goes undetected by Saru. She says, "It is because I am something more than his wife that he has become what he is." (78)

Saru being professionally superior to her husband, her importance and status rises in

society day by day; simultaneously, the importance of her husband is on the decline. She is sought after by people for various reasons, this 'widens the gulf between them. Her financial success renders Manu impotent. Now the only recourse left open to him to prove his masculinity is through sexual assault upon her. He asserts his manhood through violent sex; becomes a rapist at night, but during the day time he is a normal, cheerful human being. He becomes a victim of split personality. This abnormality terrorizes and humiliates Saru so much that she can't speak to anyone, even to him. At night he becomes monster in bed, but during the daytime only the bruises are left where as he is a normal loving, caring husband and father. Saru is perplexed. Marriage is union of two different persons, tied together to lead a conjugal life and play a vital role in the society. Shashi Deshpande has referred to this in her other novel as a pair of oxen tied together, moving in one direction. With time, as a result of certain factors this relationship undergoes a change both at the functional and psychological level. This is precisely what happens to Saru, though financially she is sound but it takes away her independence. She has to play dual role of a housewife and a doctor, now which becomes hard for her to fulfill. She analyses her situation and finally concludes to give up the job but Manu does not allow her to leave because they cannot maintain the standard with only his income: "On my salary? Come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?" (81)

This changeover of roles imbalances Saru's marital life. Her conjugal relations are put off the balance. Feeling of disenchantment and lack of interest creeps in. Separation seems inevitable to her. She intends to divorce her husband for his sadism. But then she imagines the questions she would be asked by the lawyer. For the fear of unveiling her private life, she gives up the idea of divorce.

At this point of life, she gets the news of her mother's death. She returns to her parental home after fifteen years of her marriage. It is from here the story begins, the return of the protagonist to her birthplace. She deceives herself in believing that she has come back for condolence, to look after her widowed father. The reality is that she seeks refuge over here from psychological and physical torture. She had married Manohar against her mother's wishes. The mother cursed that her marriage would be a failure. In reality too it happened so but she was trying hard to adjust herself only because she did not want her mother to be proved right. The death news is an opportunity for her to escape from her painful existence. Her parents' place where once she was born and brought up seems strange to her though it was as she had left, but she does not feel at home: "Inside here, though, were no changes. The same seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she played hopscotch as a child. The yard was bare as always." (15)

In this considerable course of time, she herself has undergone a complete change, everything seems strange to her. She is estranged even to her father. She feels like an unwelcome guest. She wonders why she came back:

"As she drinks her tea... too sweet and strong.... he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of

his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that, I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back?" (18)

Saru so much wants to open up her heart to her father but her sense of guilt holds her back:

"There can never be any forgiveness. Nor any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood." (198)

Her father listens out her failure but makes no overture to sympathize with her which she had so much expected. He turns his back on her. His disinterest gives her the feeling that if it had been an arranged marriage, her parents would have supported her; instead her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. She remembers the destiny of one of her friends:

"If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of the girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despair nor shame. For the failure had not been hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl." (199)

Saru is in a state of disorientation. She repents that she has been unfair to her mother, husband and children. At her parental home, away from her husband and children, she tries to come to terms with the various events in her life. It is here that all the tortuous introspection goes on:

"She could be reasonable and rational enough now, at this distance from him and their life together. She could dispassionately analyse his motives, her motives, her reactions. And try to find out why this, that had happened to their marriage, had happened." (98-99)

She finds an opportunity to retreat to her father's place to escape her husband's cruelties. Moreover, she could now practically analyse their behaviour towards each other. She scrutinizes their life together, she is overcome with a feeling of loss and remorse:

"And yet it was not that loss which filled her with such grief now. It was the other thing.... The thing she knew she had lost forever..., the eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man." (124)

Alike her class, she fancied to attain happiness through a male but her dream was shattered.

Saru, the protagonist seeks someone with whom she could share her fears, finally tells her father everything. It reminds one of the ancient mariner in Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*,

who compels the wedding guest to listen to his story.

The novel comes to an end with the protagonist's self-realisation and introspection. Saru faces her life once again but the facts of life have not changed for her. Her dead mother and dead brother are not going to come back to give her any kind of assurance, and she has no idea that her husband Manu will ever understand her if she tells him that he is the creator of nightmares in her world. Like all other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, Saru takes refuge in her parental home, examines her life and tries to compromise with the situation. She is neither a rebel nor a refugee but emerges as a new woman, a redeemed wife — one who has come to terms with life, one who has broken the long silence and one who is no longer afraid of the dark. She is wife reconceptualised as a woman and as an individual. Here is the dilemma of the new woman that could be resolved when the claims of selfhood are reconciled with the claims made upon her by the family and the society.

In her father's house, Saru is home bound during most of her stay. In solitude she ponders over the crisis in her life. She remarks: "Women's magazines will tell you that marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. No partnership can ever be equal.". Here Shashi Deshpande voices the factual truth about married life. A woman should always be a 'few paces behind her husband', never try to act stronger than him. If she seeks an equal partnership, her married life would be marred.

Saru tries to adjust with the circumstances and the novel comes to an end with a little hope of resettlement. She receives a letter from Manu of his arrival but she is unwilling to meet him. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes. She is all pervaded by a sense of guilt. At the same time she wishes someone to support her. She desires to give the reins of her life to somebody else:

"If only someone would tell her what to do. She would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another's hands." (88)

Saru is an amalgam of the traditional and the modern; of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; and above all revolt and compromise. She represents the middle class section of the society. The atmosphere in which she is brought up is traditional and orthodox whereas the modern education which is received by her, makes her not to accept anything without reason or logic. Her mother does not permit her to take admission to the medical college but Saru disobeys her. Saru revolts against the tradition but eventually tries to compromise with the existing reality. This adjustment with the circumstances is the result of the transitional period through which she is passing. Thus the development of the novel can be categorized in four phases, i.e., Saru recedes from reality; is overcome with frustration and a sense of loss; submission; and finally an attempt to redeem and to draw upon untapped inner reserves of strength.

The novel presents a psychological study of a male by a female and simultaneously,

during this process she reveals her own psychology. Sarita is portrayed as a self-willed lady and the underlying cause for this attitude is the negligence with which she had to cope up in her childhood, all the attention was paid to her brother Dhruva. She revolts against her mother and social values just to prove her presence. There is a sort of power play between Sarita and her mother, Sarita and her husband, Sarita and her brother.

While narrating the story of Sarita, there are issues like gender-discrimination, mother-daughter relationship, extra-marital relationship, man-woman relationship which surface in the novel. It would not be exaggerating to say that one of these factors play a crucial role in framing the destiny of Sarita.

Had Saru not been neglected by her parents in favour of her younger brother, she would not have revolted against them. The indifference which she received made her willful and rebellious. The love-less atmosphere at home incites her to leave her parental place twice though finally she returns to it to seek refuge. She had an urge to confide into somebody and for this purpose her father was the only one with whom she could share her fears. The discriminatory attitude meted out to Sarita causes a rift between mother and daughter. This gulf widens with the death of Dhruva. The mother always cursed Saru and she in turn hated her. She detests her mother so much that she is unwilling to be like her, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." Her decision to study and then to go to Medical College in spite of her mother's opposition was only to go against her and show disrespect to her. She determines to prove herself, "I'll show her. I'll make her realize." She defies her parents by choosing Manu for her husband, who is from a lower caste; but the underlying reason was that she wanted to be loved, to feel wanted.

Like most other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, Saru has a liking for her father. She seeks his advice before going to Bombay for medical studies. It is her father to whom she looks up when she faces a crisis in her married life.

The story of the novel moves within a very short circumference, revolving around Saru. The other persons who are mentioned are her parents and her family members.

Pondering over her failure in marriage, it occurs to Saru: "Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male. But what did you do when you failed to please?" There was no one to give answer to Saru's query. Before marriage she couldn't even think of more than a kiss. It was the traditional, orthodox, middle-class upbringing that inhibited her. Saru worked hard to prove herself; she revelled at her success; 'the esteem with which she was surrounded made her inches taller but the same thing made Manu inches shorter' but paralysed her conjugal happiness.

The prospects of life present a question before her:

"To be alone? Never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of my husband, my wife, my children, my parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure?" (194-95)

Her father's advice makes her realize the situation and she resolves to return to her home.

This novel has been labelled feministic by the critics but it presents direct rebellion. Although Sarita leaves her home twice but she returns to it ultimately. Over coming the crisis, the family remains intact unlike Henrik Ibsens *A Doll's House*.

Although one might feel that Saru has chosen a second bondage in order to escape from the parental family, the end of the story does bring across the need to be independent, to exorcise the ghosts of the past. If a woman's emancipation consists in drawing upon the untapped inner reserves of strength, Shashi Deshpande has indeed a feminist agenda behind this novel. The wife in the end is a redeemed one who has broken the long silence and is no longer afraid of the dark. She has been able to reconceptualise herself as a woman and as an individual. She has broken away from the older generations fatalistic attitude and knows that she can resolve her own dilemmas. Now for her selfhood is more important than the claims made by her family and the society. Thus within very traditional parameters there is an evolution and growth. Although the facts of life have not changed but her attitude towards them has.

13.5 Feminist Narratology

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a story of introspection. Saru, an eminent doctor, finds that her husband, an English lecturer who once aspired to be a poet has become a case of split personality. During the day he is a normal person, a loving father and a caring husband but during night he becomes a rapist and he terrorises her so much that she finds herself speechless to scream for help. Unable to protest, she keeps bearing until one day when she learns about her mother's death.

Saru goes back to her father's house after many years because her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. It is here, living with her father and Madhav, the young student who stays with the father, that she analyses the various events in her life and tries to come to terms with them. It is here that all the tortuous introspection goes on. But this self-examination does not provide any sense of fulfillment. Saru wanted someone with whom she could share her fears, finally tells her father everything.

Saru should be read not as a rebellious daughter who is searching for self-identity, for her freedom, not as an egoist who cannot understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by the mother, not as a traveller who goes on to a spiritual quest that ends in no resolution, but as a woman who possesses 'white, soft and clean' hands in the beginning of the narration and 'roughened' palms towards its conclusion.

Though Saru herself seems to be obsessed with her mother's unrelenting nature, certain narrative moments defy this obsession. Saru's father plays an ambivalent role in the novel. It is he who supports Saru in her decision to go to Bombay to study medicine. Here we can see

how formal education is identified with liberation, with breaking the bonds of parental house.

Ambivalence is an important element in Saru's attitude towards herself, her mother and towards her husband. It seems as if she is seeking some kind of solace in philosophical consideration. The ending of the novel makes it clear that Saru faces her life once again though nothing has changed in life for her. Her dead mother and dead brother are not going to come back to comfort her, and she is not sure whether her husband would believe that he is the creator of nightmares in her world.

The striking part in the story of Saru is her small, well-defined world. Though there is reference to the city life, to colleagues and friends but there is not any inclusion of elements from other cultures. Her world is hardly exposed to cultural hybridity. Saru is home bound during most of her stay in her father's house.

13.6 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have presented a detailed analysis of Shashi Deshpande's first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*. The unit also throws light on the development of Indian novel, Shashi Deshpande's literary career, and feminist narratology employed in the novel.

13.7 Review Questions

1. Shashi Deshpande has suggested new patterns of feminine existence. Discuss.
2. The Women portrayals are undoubtedly realistic in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Discuss.
3. Critically analyse the man-woman relationships in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*.
4. Write a detailed note on the themes in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

13.8 Bibliography

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UNIT-14

RAMA MEHTA : *INSIDE THE HAVELI*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 About the Novelist
- 14.3 A Detailed Analysis of the Novel
 - 14.3.1 Summary of the Novel
 - 14.3.2 Tradition and Modernity
 - 14.3.3 Haveli Symbol
 - 14.3.4 A New Feminist Perspective
- 14.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.5 Review Questions
- 14.6 Bibliography

14.0 Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to present a detailed analysis of the late Rama Mehta's first novel *Inside the Haveli* and also to acquaint you with her new feminist perspective depicted in the novel.

14.1 Introduction

The late Rama Mehta's first novel, *Inside the Haveli* (1977) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. The heroine, Geeta, moves from the large freedom of Bombay, where she had received her education to the sheltered prison – like security of an aristocratic 'haveli' in Udaipur. Her husband teaches at the local university, but is not unconscious of the attraction of Delhi. Within the Haveli, all is tradition – bound, and while this means strength and security, it also means isolation and stagnation. But environment changes even at the Haveli, for although Geeta gradually gets used to its life changing herself in the process, she also brings about a change even in the things at the haveli and the people concerned. At the end of the novel, she becomes the mistress of the Haveli, feeling a pride in what is best in the family traditions and trying in other respects to make the Haveli community of relatives and dependents move with the times; she thus makes sure of each forward step. K.R.S. Iyengar sums up the novel thus :

“*Inside the Haveli* is a sensitive piece of realistic fiction, even an authentic sociological

study, and it is written with a naturalness and poise that are disarming and effective at once. The evocations of scene, character and especially of atmosphere is almost uncanny. Covering a period of 15 years, the novel is properly structured into three roughly equal parts. The balance between repose and movement is well sustained, there is romance but no cheap sex, there is tension but no violence, and there is feeling for the values and the verities”.

14.2 About the Novelist

Rama Mehta was born in Nainital, India in 1923. She was one of India’s foremost sociologist as well as a prolific novelist. The first woman to be appointed to India’s foreign services, she was forced to resign her post upon marriage. Rama Mehta lived with her husband in Udaipur, where her novel *Inside the Haveli* is set. She died in 1978.

14.3 A Detailed Analysis of the Novel

In the section that follows, we shall present to you a detailed analysis of Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli*. You are, however advised to read the novel first so that you may add your own comments and observations to the analysis given here.

14.3.1 Summary of the Novel

Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* is a search, an exploration for identity which is lost in the labyrinthine traditions and customs of a society. The book has its own motion; a soft stir of values, perceptions and attitudes. It covers a period of fifteen years and can be divided into three parts—the three periods in the lives of two characters—Geeta, the heroine and the second important character in the novel is a silent witness to an entire era.

Geeta is representative of the modern educated woman, who is torn apart by two worlds—the traditional and the modern. The other protagonist of the novel is the haveli—Jeevan Nivas. It is the symbol of the oppression and tyranny of age- old customs. The haveli is the setting of the novel. All the characters closely identify with the symbol chosen. The haveli is the pivot round which revolve their aspirations, desires, hopes and fears. It gives direction to the characters’ thoughts and sensibilities.

But Geeta is haunted by the ghost of the haveli. She fights hard to be free of this demon. She rebels against the set pattern of living framed by the haveli. It becomes an open combat between the traditional and the modern. But the battle proves to be futile. In spite of all efforts, Geeta has to accept the traditional as part of a heritage. This is reflective of the attitude of the Indian woman who often has to compromise on her individuality and self-assertion.

As it happens with a majority of Indian girls, Geeta had married a boy of her parents’ choice, at the young age of nineteen. She had lived and had been educated in Bombay. She was lively and spontaneous and confident of life ahead. Her parents had always encouraged her to speak her mind. But two years of marriage had meant a change in an entire way of life.

She had been taught reticence. She felt like a log of wood weighed down by the heavy brocade clothes and the golden jewellery she had to wear. The purdah which shut off the world around stifled and suffocated her. Her mind was full of misgivings, doubts and fears. She would be afraid of her own awkwardness.

Geeta realized that the haveli was a cage which had imprisoned her youthfulness. She longed to be free from its vicious grip on her life. The strict etiquette of the haveli was difficult to follow. Its formality was stifling: “No one expressed their feelings here. They covered their emotions. Everyone moved cautiously, every word was weighed before it was spoken.”

Geeta hated the fuss and pretence of the haveli. It was also a symbol of greed and hypocrisy. “Women in the haveli were like dressed up dolls kept in a glass case for a marionette show” while “men were treated as Gods.” The whole world of the haveli revolved round the men. It cut off the women from the mainstream life of Udaipur. Living in the haveli, Geeta felt cut off from the world of freedom. She yearned to know what was happening in the outside world.

Life in the haveli had changed Geeta. She had lost her girlish impetuosity. “She had gradually forgotten her own carefree girlhood in which there had been uninhibited laughter and freedom. She had accepted the discipline of the haveli without protest. But there were many times when she felt the crushing weight of the wall that shut off the outside world.

Rama Mehta has elaborately evoked the atmosphere of the feudal glory of Udaipur. The haveli had once been witness to the great history of the Maharanas of Rajasthan. The writer has successfully portrayed the actuality of this world; which has a consciousness of well-being, culture and the richness, lustre and dignity of tradition. Like the lighthouse in Virginia Woolf’s novel, the haveli looms large over the life of all characters. Ajay Singh, Geeta’s husband, is too rooted in the traditions of the haveli, to move away to a freer world. For Geeta, the haveli is a prison, from which escape is to be sought. Even the devoted and loyal servants forget their poverty and find fulfilment in upholding the dignity of the haveli.

Geeta found herself alone in her hatred of the place. Her hope of cutting free of its pythonic grip seemed to be a flimsy, unreal dream. She wanted to shake off the apathy of the people living in it. She wanted to tell them that it was criminal to accept everything as predestination.

Geeta rebelled against all that the haveli stood for. Encouraged by her wise father-in-law she began to conduct classes for the servants and their children. She fought their ignorance and superstition. This brought a new meaning to her life. She asserted her will by enrolling the servant girl Sita in school. When a proposal for her daughter’s marriage was received, she fought it tooth and nail. “She had destroyed her own life, she would not allow her children to ruin theirs.”

Time brought about a change not only in her attitude, but also in her outlook on life.

Time had also changed the facade of the haveli. The lime-walls had darkened, the wooden doors were patchy and the balcony was broken in places. It had now acquired a mouldy exterior. But it was still aloof, austere, silent and demanding. Its hold on the life of the characters was unrelenting. Geeta knew that she could not become one with the haveli women. But this no longer troubled her. She was fascinated by the grandeur of feudal glory. She no longer felt trapped by the haveli. The fruitfulness of her various involvements made her less antagonistic. She understood that the confidence of the haveli women was born out of years of unbroken tradition. "Tradition was like a fortress protecting the people in the haveli from the outside world. It gave them security and a sense of importance."

The servant girl Sita's early marriage, and her own mental conflict over her daughter's engagement had tampered the revolt in her mind. Her family's sympathy and understanding was also responsible for the change in her attitude. The haveli was no longer her enemy. She realized that nowhere could she find such superhuman devotion: "For the first time she did not feel that she was the victim of blind prejudice or that she wanted to hit back. There was none of the desperation of being enclosed within windowless walls that she wanted to shatter." "The haveli has made me a willing prisoner within its walls."

At the end of the novel we see Geeta as the new mistress of the haveli on whom rests the burden of upholding the centuries-old traditions and customs. This final shift of responsibility gives her strength. The ghost of the haveli was finally laid to rest. Her fate was sealed. There was no escape. Values, traditions and customs had won the day.

Rama Mehta, through her narrative technique and simplicity of style, has made the novel quite poetic.

14.3.2 Tradition and Modernity

The novel makes it very clear that traditions are not mere chains of slavery passed on by the past; they have "strength and security" though it means "isolation and stagnation". It is for this reason that the novelist deserves commendation that she did not allow her protagonist to succumb to stagnation or helplessness. On the other hand she could reconcile herself to the idea that the anachronism had a meaning too. The novelist says:

"How could she allow little discomfort to blind her to the great tradition of the family" (*Inside the Haveli*, P40)

Sarla Barnabas says that the novel is a discourse encompassing the journey from "dissatisfaction to acceptance, from tolerance to generosity and finally to magnanimity." The novel describes the process of silent revolution in which the protagonist without blowing trumpets or without offending any induces her mother-in-law with a feeling of warmth towards modernity. The novel also demonstrates that the family is not a battle ground for skirmishes and the desired results can be achieved through patience and prescience. And in this process of 'give and take' the heroine also gets transformed. What appeared to be a prison acquired the status

of home, sweet home, to the extent that she said “I don’t want to leave Udaipur now.”

As a matter of fact, tradition is not a ruthless demonstration of male chauvinism alone. Neither are the restrictions imposed by the system solely meant for the men; men are equally bounded by the mores of conduct. Dr. Agrawal writes “Turbans (Safa) in the street was an established norm of etiquette; the sanctity of purdah was respected both by males and females. When women moved out of houses, some signals were sent (sometimes through drum beating, etc.) and the males used to turn their backs towards the street.”

Geeta, the protagonist is able to open a few windows to allow some breeze of freedom which is a matter of triumph — women’s awakening. She does not shout from the house top like a modern “woman lib” but yet manages significant contribution in her own humble way.

Geeta seeks to synthesize traditions with the modern values and it results into a cross cultural fertilization in which both the haveli that stands for tradition and Geeta who represents modern ethos influence each other and bring in remarkable changes in each other.

Geeta is born and brought up in the modern environment of Bombay. When she is married to Ajay, a Professor of physics by profession and Kunwar, the heir of Jeewan Niwas by tradition, the people of havelis raised apprehension that she would not be able to adjust. From the day she enters the haveli she is made to follow the etiquettes of a daughter-in-law. Dhapu, her maid is always there to pull down her veil. Pan, the chief maid, often teaches her dos and donts. A daughter-in-law of the haveli has to move and do everything in purdah. She cannot go to men’s apartment or move freely unescorted. She can neither talk much nor laugh. Above all she can meet her husband only at night. C.L. Khatri writes “Frequent taunts, nagging and nudging of relatives make her feel sick of all this.” She compromises with this life in the hope that her stay in Udaipur is temporary and her husband will one day shift to Delhi. Her mother-in-law, however is bent upon moulding her with the view in mind that one day she will be the mistress of Jeewan Niwas to carry on the centuries old traditions of the family:

“Binniji, she said gently but firmly ‘keep your face covered; by now you should be able to move around without uncovering your face.’ Then, after a brief pause, as if to give emphasis to her words, she said, “Do not talk too much to your young cousins-in-law, it’s not becoming. You know, the women are critical because you are still clumsy. I want to show them that even an educated girl can be moulded. That I was not wrong in selecting you as the wife of my only son. Besides I am getting old now and soon you will have to take over” (*Inside the Haveli*, P30)

It is natural that when two different modes of life are yoked together, they get something of each other. Geeta though so mouldering within finds herself ‘drawn in to the life of the haveli without even wanting to resist it’ (p.31). As the third person omniscient narrator says:

“There is something in this way of life that frightened and fascinated her at the same time”

She is charmed to see the celebration of the birth of her first child Vijay:

“Geeta stared at the scene below as if hypnotized. Even though Udaipur was no longer a feudal state the traditions of Mewar seemed safe in the hands of these stern looking men, all of whom seemed so composed, so determined and so refined . A glow of pride and affection filled Geeta. These were good people, gentle, kind and chivalrous. Looking at the men below she forgot her daily irritations; she felt proud to be the young mistress of the haveli. How could she allow little discomforts to blind her to the great traditions of the family?”
(*Inside the Haveli*, P40)

Geeta is also touched by the strength and security that the tradition-bound haveli provides not only to the family members but also to the servants and their family members.

Similarly her mother-in-law also shows an understanding of Geeta’s needs and adjusts herself accordingly. She sometimes overlooks Geeta’s trespassing upon men’s apartment and her free talk with the ladies of her age. As a matter of fact, she is not used to the life of pretence that prevails in the haveli. The narrator gives succinct account of the basic difference between the life style of Geeta’s parental home and of the haveli:

“When at nineteen Geeta had come as a bride to Jeewan Niwas, she was lively and spontaneous. She had not been taught to stint in giving affection; nor was she taught to keep her feelings concealed, her parents had encouraged her to speak her mind. ... In her youthful confidence she believed that with love she could win over anyone, anywhere. But after two years she was not so sure of herself. In the haveli no one really expressed their feelings. They covered their emotions in an elaborate exchange of normal gestures and words. Even her husband talked to his parents as if they were dignitaries with whom he could take no liberties.... Everyone moved cautiously; every word was weighed before it was spoken”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P 32 -33)

Geeta gets used to the life of haveli. But “she also subtly changes her immediate environment and the people concerned” (Iyengar, p. 752). In this enterprise Ajay always stands by her as a docile fellow. Infact, he loves modern values but he himself can do nothing for he has to play the role of an obedient son. So he encourages Geeta:

“I know, it is difficult for you here, but, Geeta, by being depressed, you will not change things....

“This life in purdah is not meant for you. Help me try and see what you could do in this atmosphere.”

You must always have confidence in me that I will support you in whatever you decide to do”

Geeta’s protest in the family begins with her maid servants and her husband. When Dhapu, her maid warns her on behalf of her mother-in-law not to show concern of her daughter Vijay in front of others, she snaps Dhapu:

“Stop lecturing me, I am fed up with all the pretence that goes on here, ... Don’t tell me what I should do with my own child” (p.32).

She chides Ajay when he expresses his inability to leave Udaipur for his father needs him there:

“I know the men have no problems in this world of Udaipur; you are pampered. You lead your lives and think women are mere chattels, . . .”.

The protagonist has been playing two different types of role. With Ajay she has been dealing as a modern wife. While with other members of the family she has been trying to maintain the ‘feminine decorum’ of the haveli as a traditional daughter-in-law. She touches the feet of the elders every morning, keeps her head covered and bent, uses the term like ‘Hukhum’ while addressing to the elders and meekly obeys them. She is considerate and compassionate to her husband as well. She comes to realize that her husband is firmly rooted in the tradition of Udaipur and no longer pesters him to leave Udaipur and settle in Delhi.

But there are things for which she strongly feels and cannot compromise with them. She stands defiant before Pari for sending Sita to school. “Pariji, Sita must go to school”.

She turns down her decision authoritatively : “Binniji, Sita is a child of a servant. She cannot go to school”. Infact it was not the tradition to educate daughter particularly of servants. As Pari tries to convince her : “Binniji, a girl who has to live in the village must be sturdy. She cannot be pampered. Her limbs must be strong to pull water from the well, to plough the fields, collect the cow dung. As it is, Sita is lazy. You send her to school and she will begin to think she is a little lady”. Sita urges strongly but feels defeated in the end. Her rebellion temperament comes out in her soliloquy:

“What if I cannot trace my ancestry beyond my grand-father? That is no reason why I should surrender”.

But ultimately she wins the battle with the help of Dhapu. She conveys Geeta’s mind to Bhagwat Singh Ji, the master of the haveli. Bhagwat Singh Ji favours Geeta and shows his concern for her. She is filled with a sense of love and gratitude for him and curses the etiquette that prevents her to express her feeling to him:

“Even after seven years I am a stranger to those that are mine, and I will always remain a stranger”.

Though Geeta succeeds in her mission, it irks her motner-in-law and Pari and other tradition-stricken maids and relatives. Even Geeta is not sure of the goodness of her decision, she feels remorse for having acted impulsively. Though she faces initial resentment, Sita dispels all apprehensions about herself. And everyone feels satisfied with the decision. Ajay lauds her victory: “You did the right thing; I am proud of you. It is time for the new ideas to enter the haveli,”.

But Geeta is neither a militant nor a radical feminist character. She is moderate and practical. She knows how difficult it is to bring in new ideas in this patriarchal set-up where the authority emanates from the eldest male in the family.

“The change won’t come as quickly as you think,’ Geeta said sadly. You don’t know the women here; they are all rooted in ignorance and superstition. For the slightest thing they run to Arjun the fortune teller”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P 137).

Geeta also starts classes for illiterate women and children in which she teaches them how to read and write, tells them stories and takes sewing and knitting classes also. She is aware of the fact that change in this system can be brought only through education. This is a slow but sure way of success. Though the classes come about accidentally without any plan, it becomes popular and evokes mixed reactions. Her mother-in-law and mistress of other havelis are critical of the classes but Ajay, her father-in-law, maids and some others appreciate the endeavour. Bhagwat Singh’s wife receives complaints from the neighbours:

“Karwarni Sa, my niece’s husband is already fed up.

Before going to work he has to eat cold roties left for him because his wife comes here to listen to stories; is that what a woman should do?”

Kanwarni Sa and Geeta feel wounded. She defends her daughter-in-law before others but does not approve of her work. Geeta experiences an emotional turbulence. On the one hand she thinks in the spirit of a social rebel:

“Geeta burned with rage as she sat with her face covered, her lips tightly pressed together as if they could not be trusted to relax. Her anger was making her body tremble. She wanted to lash out at Manji more than anyone else. She felt betrayed by her. How dare she say that these classes were an excuse for the women to shirk work? And what if they were, why should the young girls help in the haveli just because their mothers were servants of the haveli?” (*Inside the Haveli*, P167)

On the other she is overwhelmed with admiration and gratitude for her mother-in-law. She feels remorse and responsible for tarnishing the image of the haveli which she does not want the least. In upholding the dignity of the haveli she finds herself one with her mother-in-law and says to herself “How dare anyone say a word against the haveli, these classes are not worth continuing. I will stop the girls from coming”. In fact, this incident forced her to think herself as the future custodian of the family tradition. She declares to herself:

“I don’t want to leave Udaipur now. The haveli has made me a willing prisoner within its walls. How stupid I was not to see all that it holds. Where else in the world would I get this kind of love and concern? The children must grow up here. They must learn to love and respect this ancient house”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P170)

It, however, does not mean that Geeta is fully baptized. In five years she reconciles

herself with the life of the haveli but with reservations. Her commitment to modern values stands there:

“She still did not like the rigidity with which the women held on to old customs. But what irked her most was the ill-defined nature of her role in the family. She could not become one with the haveli women nor did she want to. The tension between her and them, though muted, remained”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P 178)

In these years she makes her presence felt in the world of havelis. She carves out her own identity as a ‘new women’ living within the ambit of tradition.

The conflict between tradition and modernity over the marriage of Vijay, comes to a climax in the last section of the novel where the situation demands the sacrifice of one or another. Geeta’s eldest daughter Vaijay is just thirteen years old when Daulat Singh’s wife gives a proposal to the mistress of Jeewan Niwas for the marriage of Vijay with her grand son Vir Singh. Bhagwat Singh and his wife are happy to see their rival bumbled and they are willing to make engagement before Vir Singh goes abroad. But Geeta loses control over herself and speaks for the first time in a raised voice to her mother-in-law, “Bhabhi, whatever happens, Vijay can’t get engaged at this stage”.

Geeta runs wayward in her thoughts and feels trapped. When Ajay comes to her, she bursts out on him unmindful of the decorum of her language:

“I have put with enough in your family, and I am not prepared to bend any more. I won’t ever agree to this criminal act of deciding who Vijay will marry when she is still a child.... You are all a bunch of hypocrites.... Well, Ajay, let me tell you that I don’t care what family Vir Singh comes from or how much money he has buried in the ground. I will never agree to engage Vijay to a boy who is still in college”.

It is not that Geeta who finds fault with the family and the boy but her opposition is basically on the ground of the principle that disapproves of child marriage in the haveli. Perhaps she wants to realize her own dream of life in her daughter:

“I cannot agree to the engagement. It is too early.

What if he does not turn out as well as he looks? My

Vijay would languish in that vast haveli”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P220)

Though emotionally Geeta is in a state of flux, she sticks to her gun mutely but stubbornly even amidst chaos and confusion. Life inside the haveli hangs in balance. Every eye is turned to Geeta. But she remains defiant.

“As you probably know Daulat Singhji and his brother came the other day; they again urged for Vijay’s engagement to their son. The horoscopes match perfectly. Our child has been born under the most auspicious constellation of stars. But I was not waiting to hear what the astrologers had to say before talking to you. Binniji, I have been agitated for the last few

weeks. I have looked at the proposal from every angle. I am still not quite sure whether it is right to engage a girl as young as our Vijay. But a girl has to marry, if not today, then tomorrow". (*Inside the Haveli*, P247)

She undergoes the trauma of tension, indecision and conflict. Rama Mehta pens down her troubled psyche authentically like a psychoanalyst:

"Geeta realized the wisdom of his words, but still she felt un-easy. But she was no longer sure of herself. She remembered the handsome young face of Vir Singh, and thought perhaps he was what he looked, straight and honorable. But then as if to dissuade herself she reasoned that Vir Singh like her husband would never go against his parents' wishes. ... But some part of her unconscious mind was not convinced. She was troubled. She thought of her own marriage. Her parents had chosen the right man for her; she was happy;..." (*Inside the Haveli*, P 252)

Through her brooding the novelist communicates to us the real import of the guardian in a traditional family. When Bhagwat Singh takes his last breath and her mother-in-law appears in widow's attire, Geeta in a spasm of grief clasps her mother-in-law's frail body and weeps bitterly like a common Indian woman. But her mother-in-law reminds her of her responsibility as the mistress of the haveli and comforts her:

'Don't cry my child. Your father-in-law lived honourably. He has gone, leaving you the mistress of this house. If you loved him, you will keep this haveli as a trust for your children. He did his duty by us all. Now it is your turn. Don't weep. If you don't show strength now, to whom shall I look for comfort? You are all I have, everything else has gone'. (*Inside the Haveli*, P 264)

The novel ends on a tragic note evoking a sense of pathos. It is the greatness of Rama Mehta that she blends the two streams in one. Geeta is both conformist and non-conformist. She conforms to the modern values of education and marriage. But she appears nonconformist when she takes over the charge of the haveli to continue its age long tradition. She makes herself fit in the 'unbroken chain' of the cultural heritage. Rama Mehta's success lies not just in conducting a voyage in the traditional way of life of an aristocratic family, but in as Anita Desai says "the understanding she brought to it' in harmonizing the two divergent trends".

14.3.3 Haveli Symbol

Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* is a novel dealing with an exploration for identity "which is lost in the labyrinthine traditions and customs of a society". The novel covers a period of fifteen years and can be divided into three parts — the three periods in the lives of two characters — Geeta, the heroine and the second important character in the novel is the 'Haveli', a silent witness to the era. Like Geeta, the haveli — Jeewan Niwas — is equally a protagonist and a symbol of the oppression and tyranny of age old customs.

The novel opens with a lively picture of Sangram Singh Ji's haveli with all its details of unplanned architecture:

“Sangram Singh ji's haveli is the biggest in the gully although it is not the biggest in the old city. The haveli has no real shape to it, the marble and stone seemed to have been hastily piled up on top of one another. It expanded through the years but without any plan, it recedes in places leaving empty land, and yet it pushes out in other directions, making the gully even more narrow where it bends around the mansion which has three stories”. (*Inside the Haveli*, P 3)

The courtyards divided the haveli into various sections - male apartments, female apartments and servants' quarters. Entry of the ranking woman to the male apartment was prohibited and hence it always remained a place of fascination for them. The novelist provides a beautiful description as to how Geeta longed and planned;

“... to trespass into the men's apartments. She already knew the nooks and corners of the Zenana. But she had never been into the other side of the haveli. It intrigued her and she longed to know how the men lived; where her husband relaxed when he came back from the university, where her father-in-law received his many visitors. She knew this section was out of bounds for women...” (*Inside the Haveli*, P11). Even the entry of the male members to the female apartment until the evening was undesirable except on some restricted occasions of urgency. This embarrassed Ajay Singh too —

‘After his marriage Ajay too found the segregated way of life in the haveli oppressive. Geeta was a companion to him, with whom he could talk and discuss that were not related to Udaipur. But he had to wait till the evening to talk to her.

The haveli creates an essentially Rajasthani milieu in the novel. It speaks of the feudal glory of the Maharana's times. S.K. Agrawal writes:

“The characters inside the haveli are distinctly real; The novelist had known them. They do not exist today but they existed and what is more, they existed as the author portrayed them. They spoke the plain language of everyday conversation. Every word of address like “hukkum”, “Kanwarani Sa”, “Kunwar Sa”, “Bai Sa”, etc. — counts and is made to add to the mood of the haveli.”

The haveli is portrayed, writes S.K. Agrawal, in such a way that it “for all practical purposes, emerges as a symbol of the contemporary stratified feudal society. It also throws light on the master servant relationship of the contemporary feudal set up” The novelist says :-

“The servants in the haveli once slept wherever they found room to spread their mats ... their quarters are not on the same elevation as the haveli, but a few steps below”.

As a matter of fact, all the sections had their own sense of dignity and pride. However, the poor and downtrodden were pathetically dependent on their masters and mistresses, the

kindness and benevolence with which they were treated mitigated the indignity of their existence. All the characters in the novel closely identify themselves with the symbol chosen. "There are no secrets, there could be none in the haveli. It is one household, all the courtyards are connected."

The haveli is the setting for the novel, it is the axis round which revolves the aspirations, desires, hopes and fears of all the characters. It as well gives direction to the character's thoughts, feelings and sensibilities. It is the age old ideas and customs that haunt almost every character, everyone whether it is Pari or Dhapu or Bhagat Singh Ji's wife who suggests Geeta some or the other etiquettes in the name of the haveli. Geeta, an educated girl from Bombay with modern ideas, joins the haveli as its young mistress. Initially she finds it quite difficult to live within the high walls of the mansion and fights tooth and nail to be free of this demon. She rebels against the set pattern of living framed by the haveli. It becomes an open combat between the traditional and the modern. But the battle proves to be futile as the haveli entangles her closer and closer into its folds. This is reflective of the attitude of the Indian woman who very often cannot resist, and has to compromise on her individuality and self assertion. As it happens with a majority of Indian girls, Geeta had married a boy of her parents' choice at the young age of nineteen. She had lived and had been educated in Bombay. She was lively and spontaneous and was full of confidence that with love she could win over anyone, any where. Her parents had encouraged her to speak her mind . But two years' association of the haveli brought about a change in her entire way of life.

The novelist, very artistically, depicts Geeta's dislike of the extreme formality inside the haveli. Geeta says "No one expressed their feelings here. They covered their emotions. Everyone moved cautiously, everyword was weighed before it was spoken." The heroine sees the suppression of spontaneity everywhere and she, therefore, is also expected to practice it.

This makes the novel a search, an exploration of a modern educated girl for identity which is lost in the complexities of traditions and customs of the haveli. Geeta realizes that the haveli is a cage which has imprisoned her youthfulness. The haveli is a dome of formality, where no one really expressed their feelings. Instead, they covered their emotions in an elaborate exchange of formal gestures and words. Even a grown up had to talk to his parents as if they were dignitaries. Naturally, the form and courtesy which the young maintained before the old lacked spontaneity. In the two years, Geeta had never heard any really unpleasant exchange of words between different members of the family. She also knew that certain relatives were not liked and others were definitely disliked, but they continued to come to the haveli and were given the impression that the haveli was overjoyed to see them. Even with the servants no one lost their tempers; they were reprimanded with polite but cutting words which was almost worse than open abuse. The novel, thus, depicts the typical Mewari culture of Rajasthan which lacks spontaneity.

How the women were denied the world of freedom has been described in the novel through its protagonist, Geeta. Geeta hated the pretentious life of the haveli. The haveli was a symbol of greed and hypocrisy. The haveli also belittled the existence of women. They were no better than dolls which add to the physical beauty of the house. The novelist says:

“Women in the haveli were like dressed up dolls kept in a glass case for marionette show” while “Men were treated as Gods”. The whole world revolved round the men. The preoccupation of women inside the haveli was to uphold the customs of their proud ancestors. This cut them off from the mainstream life of Udaipur. Living in the haveli, Geeta felt cut off from the outside world and the world of freedom became a dream for her.

The novelist makes it abundantly explicit that woman herself is responsible for her deteriorating condition in the society. The haveli smothered Geeta’s feelings and emotions. She found the daughters and daughters-in-law of her age, even of the other havelis, quite shrewd and calculating. They never expressed an opinion and never revealed their feelings. The novelist comments:

“They seemed like little canaries in a cage who sang and twittered but seemed to know no passion.”

The women yearn to know more about the world beyond from behind their veils. They follow the traditions of their families mechanically at the bidding of their elders without any feelings of commitment to them. They wait for the day when they would be freed from their confinement. Geeta longs to feel the calm acceptance of life.

The author imaginatively deals with her own experiences in the novel, and the haveli stands for all that she found flimsy, unreal, tyrannical and oppressive in the mansion where she lived. Geeta rebelled against all this and tried to assert herself. Encouraged by her father-in-law she fought the ignorance and superstitions of the servants and their children. This enlivened her. She asserted her will, first, by enrolling the servant girl Sita and then by declining the proposal for her daughter’s marriage. The language used also well brings out the frankness, straightforwardness, and the boldness of the protagonist to wage a war against the male-dominated society. This is exhibited in Geeta’s reactions. She would even tell her husband:

“You are all a bunch of hypocrites. In order to get the girl you want you make any promise, agree to any thing. Don’t I know the smooth velvety language of the havelis.”

Geeta, despite her best efforts, could not become one with the women, who were quite shrewd and calculating, in the haveli. This, however, did not trouble her any longer as she felt attracted by the grandeur of the haveli, i.e. feudal glory. Her perceptions and attitudes regarding the haveli underwent a complete transformation and she no longer felt trapped. Even the haveli could not spare itself from the effect of changing times; time had changed the façade of the haveli. The lime-walls grew darker, wooden doors patchy and the marble more yellow. It no longer remained a fascinating mansion. Despite its silence, its grip on the life of the

characters was unrelenting. The haveli enmeshed Geeta closer and closer into its folds. She could well comprehend “that the tradition was like a fortress protecting the people in the haveli from the outside world. It gave them security and a sense of importance.”

The novel is the story of an educated woman — Geeta who tries to be progressive and revolutionary initially but ultimately accepts the things as they are. Many factors — Geeta’s own mental conflict over her daughter’s engagement, her family’s sympathy and understanding, Sita’s early marriage despite her resistance etc. combine to bring about an attitudinal change in Geeta. She found the haveli a place where one could witness superhuman devotion. The novelist writes.

“For the first time she did not feel that she was the victim of blind prejudice or that she wanted to hit back. There was none of the desperation of being enclosed within windowless walls that she wanted to shatter.”

Geeta herself says:

“The haveli has made me willing prisoner within its walls.”

At the end of the novel, the haveli — an abode of values, traditions and customs — wins the combat. Now we see Geeta as the new mistress of the haveli on whom rests the burden of upholding the centuries old traditions and customs. She becomes the custodian of the haveli and takes the responsibility of safeguarding the age old customs and traditions of the haveli. The final shift of responsibility makes Geeta bold and strong. The ghost of the haveli is finally laid to rest and Geeta takes to upkeep the customs and traditions of the haveli.

Through the haveli symbol, the novelist has succeeded in capturing the spirit of the era of feudalism and the contemporary Rajasthani milieu before which Geeta ultimately kneels in submission. Reflecting on Geeta’s submission Dr. Agrawal writes:

“The way the novelist has brought about Geeta’s submission is in concurrence with typical Mewari culture which through the devices of non - cooperation, isolation etc. tries to alienate a person from the main stream society, and when one is almost on the verge of alienating oneself, it wins over a person through sympathy and mutual understanding.”

14.3.4 A New Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective presented in the novel is closer to Indian sensibility. Rama Mehta emphatically says that change can be established through conformity also. The novel *Inside the Haveli* is a fine example of this. A girl from Bombay, Geeta, is married into a Rajasthani family and the door is locked upon her. She gradually changes everyone in the haveli to a large extent through patience and understanding. She changes her father-in-law. She changes her husband whom initially she could not see during the day time. She would see him only in the dark; she changes all that.

14.4 Let Us Sum Up

The novel *Inside the Haveli* presents an authentic, credible and realistic women's world. The traditional Indian woman suffers, submits and adjusts herself to the circumstances; this aspect has been portrayed very artistically in this novel. Rama Mehta very aptly demonstrates that tradition is not a ruthless tradition of male-chauvinism alone and a reformatory revolution can be brought about without blowing trumpets. A woman can contribute significantly to social awakening in her own humble way.

14.5 Review Questions

1. *Inside the Haveli* presents an authentic, credible and realistic women's world. Discuss.
2. "Rama Mehta, through her narrative technique and simplicity of style, has succeeded in projecting a typical Mewari milieu". Do you agree? Discuss.
3. "Replacement or change can be brought about even through conformity." How does Geeta do this? Throw light on the major characteristics of Geeta the heroine in *Inside the Haveli*.
4. Discuss the significance of 'Haveli' symbol in *Inside the Haveli*.

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UNIT–15

MAHESH DATTANI : *FINAL SOLUTIONS*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 About the Playwright
- 15.3 English Drama in India
- 15.4 An Acquaintance with the plays of Mahesh Dattani
- 15.5 Introduction to the Text
 - 15.5.1 A Detailed Analysis of ‘*Final Solutions*’
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- 15.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.7 Review Questions
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15.0 Objectives

In this unit we intend to acquaint you with one of the three important playwrights (Girish Karnad, Nissim Ezekiel and Mahesh Dattani) Mahesh Dattani and discuss in detail one of his famous plays – *Final Solutions*. Besides, we shall also throw light on the development of English drama in India and discuss in brief the plays of Dattani.

15.1 Introduction

A lingering tragic consequence of the erstwhile British Colonial policy of “Divide-and-Rule”, communalism or religious disharmony between Hindus and Muslims (Islamic) threatens even today to occasionally rupture the secular and non-theocratic fabric of India as a nation. The multilingual literature of contemporary India has not infrequently addressed this issue, but it is only recently that this concern has been powerfully dramatized in a play written by Mahesh Dattani, a playwright who writes exclusively in English for a pan-Indian audience.

In his play, *Final Solutions*, Dattani embodies a deeply compassionate study of the feelings and sentiments of three generations of Muslims and Hindus, going back in time to the Partition of the Indian subcontinent by the British in 1947. The title of Dattani’s play ironically resonates to the pitch of Hitler’s “Final Solution” which planned to exterminate all the Jews in Europe and the world. Thus does Dattani evoke the dark shades of religious bigotry and

intolerance, communal violence and mutual hatred that tear apart the peoples of a country.

15.2 About the Playwright

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English playwright to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays* for the year 1998. The Sahitya Akademi Award Citation says, “Dattani’s work probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender. . . a brilliant contribution to Indian Drama in English.” Dattani is a theatre personality. He has experience in the art of production and staging. He seems to be quite hopeful about the future reception of his plays. In his Preface to *Collected Plays*, Dattani writes:

“I am certain that my plays are true reflections of my time, place and socioeconomic background. I am hugely excited and curious to know what the future holds for me and my art in the new millennium in a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally (2000:XV)”.

15.3 English Drama in India

Drama in India is as old as the Indian customs. Right from the Vedic Era Indian theatre made its presence felt amidst Vedic ritualism and ethnicities. Indians were indeed comfortable in illustrating their mood through the artistry of *mudraa*, *lasya* and *Natya*. Gradually therefore the distinct style of dramaturgy evolved as an illustration of the rich mores of Indian tradition, rituals, customs and ethnicity. That was just the beginning and thereafter there was no looking back. Right from the ancient era to the modern era theatre in India has embedded its glorious success whilst enriching India’s culture to a great extent. With the passage of time Indian drama became lot more contemporary whilst revealing the naturalistic and realistic attributes of the socio economic and political scenario of India. The larger-than-life aspects of the ancient Sanskrit drama gradually faded away. Dramas were no longer the narrative forms of the heroes and celestial beings, but it became a true representation of the “unedited realisms” of Indian social life. Bengali, Marathi, and Kannad theatres coupled with the innovativeness of the English theatre, added a whole fresh dimension to the artistry of Indian *Natya*. The introduction of the artistic quality through the English drama in India added that contemporary dimension to Indian *Natya*.

The modish aspect in Indian drama was first sown during the British Imperialism. Indian drama stood apart as the weapon of protest against the British Raj. It is then; English drama in India made its presence felt quite enormously as a portrayal of the realisms of daily life. The contemporaneousness of the varied facets of the English drama in India for the very first time then aided in illustrating the finer aspects of life teamed with the regular instances of the poverty, sufferings and agony of the common people. English theatres mainly initiated in different European countries and evolved in diverse stages; however in India English drama arrived in the later part of the 17th century with the arrival of the ‘East India Company’. British

colonialism then did play the major role in changing the Indian dramaturgy whilst making it lot more chic.

English drama in India gained a dimension with the establishment of the three Presidency' Towns by the British. Calcutta, Mumbai and Madras therefore became the three-metropolis in exemplifying the true aura of contemporary art forms through the grace of English drama. These cities then had the typical urban middle class audiences, which again helped in the thriving prosperity of the English theatre. The success of the English drama in India was then, not based on the sale of the tickets but was grounded on the support and patronage of the affluent class and the theatres were then an emblematic representation of the European ways of life. The colonial aspects, British Imperialism coupled with the tuneful harmonization of the Eastern and Western philosophy then crafted a marked change in the story line and in the dramatic art whilst making English drama in India a true representation of the British culture, ways of life and of course a depiction of the British exploitations.

The nature of the English drama in India again changed with the independence of India. It was then not only a representation of the European lifestyle but a lot more. English drama then became a typical art form in epitomizing the socio- political and economic status of Independent India. The rich chronicle of Indian drama, the colossal history of Indian Natya then witnessed a marked change with the advent of the eminent theatre personalities like Habib Tanvir, K.N. Pannikar, Ginish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and many others who further carried English drama in India to the further step of maturity. English drama in India, which was once just the illustration of British mistreatment, then gained a further up to date projection as the theatre personalities then tried to highlight Indian tradition, folklore, custom, rituals. conventions. and rites amidst the innovativeness of English drama. The saga of English drama, which began back in the long gone era of the British Imperialism further continued and is still an eminent part of the theatre forms in India. Continuous study, deep understanding and above all the tuneful blend of the west and East have helped English drama in India as a distinct art form whilst aiding it to stand apart with pride and dignity.

15.4 An Acquaintance with the Plays of Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani's *Collected Plays* consists of eight plays- *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do The Needful*, *Final Solutions*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Where There's a Will*. These plays are about contemporary reality that one encounters in the metropolis of our country.

Mahesh Dattani's plays deal with unconventional themes, which make him unacceptable to the conservative audience. But he overcomes these by his forceful dialogue and insight into human nature. He writes about hijras, homosexuality and politics in present day society with confidence and fortitude. In the Play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, he deals with the life story of a hijra named Kamala, a beautiful eunuch whose murder remained mysterious. The play

presents the plight of the hijra community who are equidistant from men and women. They sing and dance at weddings and childbirths. The irony, however, is that they can neither marry nor give birth to children. The playwright is bold enough to depict the life of the hijras who are looked down upon in the society. Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Muggy Night in Mumbai* deal with theme of homosexuality. M. K. Naik writes:

“The motif of homosexuality which is touched upon in *Bravely Fought the Queen* is at the centre of *A Muggy Night in Mumbai*. The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Mumbai, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self-discoveries. Though they are all sailing in the same boat, each has his/her own oar to put in, his/her own flag to hoist. Kamlesh is weak and sensitive; Sharad is his exact opposite, with his jaunty nonchalance. Ed assumes a double identity, with Prakash as his second *Avatar*. Bunny is true to the ‘kindred’ point of home and the Homo Den; he is a good husband at home and a very competent one in his bedroom, while he enjoys himself as a gay soul in the company of the initiated. Ranjit solves his problem by going abroad where he feels he will be more readily accepted; and Deepali is a militant lesbian, who declares, ‘Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman’. Totally free of guilt, she is strong and bold enough to strike Ed when he becomes violent. The wedding music heard constantly in the background in the Final Act is an ironic commentary on the lives of these homosexuals for whom marriage can only be a doubly dirty twice-four letter word. “(*Littercrit* June-Dec.2000: 51)

Homosexuality, the playwright feels is a subject that people want to discuss but do not talk about because of social taboos. Therefore, he uses it as a theme in his plays to give a chance to the people to look into the problem intently.

The issues of acceptance and power struggles run right through all Dattani's plays. His play *Dance Like a Man* is the story of Jairaj and Ratna, two Bharatnatayam dancers, Jairaj's father Amritlal Parekh, their daughter Latha and her fiancé Biswas. Using a gently ironic touch, the play subtly deals with serious issues such as the clash between traditions and modernity, the politicization of culture and the politics of marriage. The play also brings up gender issues vis-a-vis the space afforded to women in a patriarchal society. The protagonist is of course Jairaj, the man who fights social values to win respect, the man who may face a ‘woman's dance form’ but does so like ‘a man’. The structure of the play is marked with moving fluidity between past and present, slowly unraveling a ‘secret’ buried in the past, which must be faced before it destroys the future. Tara, another very famous play, deals with gender biases and prejudices which still affect the lives of many girl children even amongst educated, urban families.

For Mahesh Dattani, a play germinates from the idea that appeals to him suddenly. He himself writes, “They invariably do. Social issues move me and I like to examine an idea from different angles. The plays where the content came first are *On a Muggy Night* and *Final Solutions*. As for the latter, I was asked to write a play about communal tensions and I said, “What can one write about that other than platitudes?” But out of that churning emerged *Final*

Solutions. Sometimes the characters spoke to me first, as in *Tara* and *On a Muggy Night*. In *Dance Like a Man*, the plot emerged out of a flashback structure where the same actors play different generations. Sometimes images make the first impact; then, the set” (The Hindu, July 26, 2004). *Final Solutions* explores the communal tensions that divide our society even in relatively modern times.

The play *Final Solutions* deals with a political theme. It throws light on the communal tensions that bedevil our society. M.K. Naik rightly says: -

“*Final Solutions* is the only political play written by Dattani so far. Two Muslim boys, Javed and Babban, take shelter in the house of Ramnik Gandhi, a Hindu businessman, while communal riot rages outside. During the course of their interaction, Ramnik reveals the past and confesses how his father and grandfather had burnt down the shop of a rival, Muslim businessman, in a communal riot forty years ago. Ramnik’s mother also remembers the travails of Partition, and how both Hindus and Muslims suffered then. Babban’s comment at the end is significant: ‘if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed.’ But Dattani doesn’t end the play on this romantic note. The Chorus, which has the last word, adds, ‘One reality cannot accept another reality.’

Allied to this is another recurrent theme in Dattani: familial relationships. Ramnik never ceases to hear the harsh rattling of the skeleton in the family cupboard, which has given him an outsize guilt complex. Hardika carries her hatred of her in-laws, who persecuted her in the best traditions of the Hindu joint family, as a perpetual chip on her wrinkled shoulders; and Smita, the daughter of Ramnik knows that her secret love for Babban is a hopeless passion” (Ibidem 51-52).

15.5 Introduction to the Text

15.5.1 A Detailed Analysis of ‘*Final Solutions*’

Final Solutions is a play about communal violence, representing through a family unit the divide and schisms that operate in our country leading to mutual suspicion and hatred. The divide between the personal and the public is blurred- the play shows how individual and personal resentments and failures can so easily be transferred on to the ‘other’ may be. The play depicts our own paranoia and the cycle of violence and prejudice. The most overwhelming issue facing us today in contemporary India is that of communalism and violence, and the hatred that manifests it. The play traces the cycle of prejudice and attempts to look beyond the hatred, to try and see if any ‘Final Solution’ is possible.

Final Solutions has a powerful contemporary resonance as it addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society, i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another.

What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental nor simplified. The play presents a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. Yet the issue is not moralized, as the demons of communal hatred are located deep within us. The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujarati business family, Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son Ramnik Gandhi is haunted by the knowledge that his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen. Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna lives by the strict code of the Hindu Samskar and the granddaughter, Smita, cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy. The pulls and counter-pulls of the family are exposed when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek shelter in their house on being chased by a baying Hindu mob. Babban is a moderate while Javed is an aggressive youth. After a nightlong exchange of judgments and retorts between the characters, tolerance and forgetfulness emerge as the only solution of the crisis. Thus, the play becomes a reminder of the conflicts raging not only in India but in other parts of the world. The play raises questions on secularism and pseudo-secularism. It forces us to look at ourselves in relation to the attitudes that persist in the society.

The play involves a lot of introspection on the part of the characters and thus induces similar introspection in the readers. Chorus is a realistic stylization. It represents the conflicts of the characters. It is, in a sense, the psychophysical representation of the characters and also provides the audience "the visual images of the characters' conflicts. There is no stereotyped use of the characterization of the chorus because communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters" (Arvind Gaur, *sulekha.com*).

15.5.2 Some Significant Observations

Dattani's plays hold mirror unto contemporary Indian society in certain respects. The struggle of individual human beings in a society is uppermost in his mind. He to create this "space" for them. Dattani writes, "Thematically I talk about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand this space. They live on the fringes of the society and are not looking for acceptance, but are amounting to grab as much fringe-space for themselves as they can" (*Graphiti2 April2000*: 7). This statement by Dattani is one of the most definitive descriptions of his themes and concerns. All his plays focus on the marginalized entity and his or her struggle to redefine the centre. His protagonists question the dominant values that construct social and gender identities.

Certain idiosyncracies of the playwright are really striking. Dwelling upon one of his idiosyncracies, Anita Nair writes: "Dattani has his idiosyncrasy when it comes to names. Four names occur again and again in his plays and these names represent more than just syllables. Daksha is helpless. Lata means confidence. Salim indicates a passivity and Praful is the uncle

who can be depended upon.”(Columns by Anita Nair, newindpress on Sunday)

Another significant feature of his plays is that they portray traditional women with some contempt (be it Sonal of *Where There is A Will*, or Prema Gowda in *Do The Needful*) while the younger women are depicted as scheming problem solvers (Ratna in *Dance Like a Man* and Bharati in *Tara*). In contrast, men are shown to be as a victim suffering from a woman’s machinations—Jairaj is a victim of Ratna’s machinations, Patel suffers because of Bharati and Hansmukh is victim of the schemes of Preeti.

Dattani’s plays do not have pat endings; they end with a question in the audience’s mind—what is going to happen next? It is something that the audience has to answer as he drives back home after watching a play; even more so when he reads the plays back to back. In the plays, the characters are the mouthpiece of Dattani but the playwright maintains the position of an outsider. In many ways it is a reflection of the person he is. Dattani is non-judgmental and hence is simply an observer. He does not attempt to advocate change or even convey a message.

Dattani’s characterization is also superb and makes his plays highly enjoyable. He knows the world he is talking about and shows it just the way it is—the hypocrisy, the prejudices, the dilemmas, nothing is spared. And yet if there is a point where the playwright stumbles, as Anita Nair rightly says, “then it is when unconsciously the characters who have his sympathies end up much more resolved and developed even if they are not the principal ones : Sharad from *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Anarkali from *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Alpesh from *Do The Needful*”(Columns by Anita Nair, newindpress on Sunday).

As a matter of fact, Dattani’s plays have varied content and varied appeal. “His characters seldom mouth lines, which will be quoted by just about everyone”. Nor does his thematic content rise to extraordinary heights. But what makes him distinct as a playwright is the manner he speaks to the audience straight from his heart. His expectations of his audience are high; he does not provide ready-made solutions to them. Nor does he aim at changing the society but only seek to offer to the audience some kind of insight into their own lives.

15.7 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have discussed that Mahesh Dattani is an urban Indian writer who writes about contemporary themes and issues. Accordingly his play *Final Solutions* (a play in Three Acts) deals with the theme of communalism. It is replete with communal tensions that bedevil our society. His plays, sometimes, focus on the issues which are thinly disguised as ‘personal’ but which are directly related to and arise from the social contexts in which we live and work.

15.8 Review Questions

1. “The unconventional themes in Dattani’s plays make the playwright unacceptable to

the conservative audience.” Discuss with reference to Dattani’s *Final Solution*.

2. Discuss in detail the theme of Dattani’s *Final Solutions*.

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UNIT-16

KALIDASA : ABHIJNANSHAKUNTALAM (I)

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Life of Kalidasa
- 16.3 Works of Kalidasa
- 16.4 Analysis of the Text: *Abhijnanashakuntalam*
 - 16.4.1 Meaning and obliquity of the title
 - 16.4.2 Analysis of the story
 - 16.4.3 Sources of the play
 - 16.4.4 Development of the theme
- 16.5 Let Us Sum up
- 16.6 Review Questions
- 16.7 Further Readings

16.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Kalidasa and his play , *Abhijnanashakuntalam*:

- Kalidasa as poet
- life of Kalidasa
- works of Kalidasa
- theme of *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*:
- plot of *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*

16.1 Introduction

Kalidasa who is regarded as the Shakespeare of India is a mastermind in Sanskrit literature. His genius has been recognized from very early times. He has been and will ever be enshrined in the hearts of the countrymen as the prince of Indian poetry. Banabhatta, of *Kadambari*, Kumarila of the first half of the 8th century, Pt Govardhanacharya, Jayadeva and

other later writers have elevated Kalidasa to the level of the lords of poets. It is not only Indian writers and scholars who place him at the head of all the Sanskrit poets, unparalleled and unsurpassed by those who have preceded or followed him, but the foreign writers and scholars also have very high opinion. Kalidasa has evoked spontaneous outpourings of praise and manifestations of admiration from foreign scholars and poets who had access to his works either directly or through translations. The well-known philosopher and traveler, Humboldt, pronounces the following judgement - "Kalidasa, the celebrated author of the *Shakuntala*, is a masterly describer of the influence which Nature exercises upon the minds of lovers. Tenderness in the expression of feelings and richness of creative fancy have assigned to him his lofty place among the poets of all nations". The celebrated critic, Schlegel, has also assigned him a very high position amongst the glorious company of the 'Sons of Song'. Several eminent orientalisks have also offered their tribute of praise to our Indian Shakespeare, as Sir William Jones was the first to call him - the very comparison of Kalidasa to Shakespeare is the highest form of eulogy that could be bestowed upon him by foreign critics. Sir Monier-Williams, while writing about *Shakuntala*, expresses himself : "No composition of Kalidasa displays more the richness of his poetical genius, the exuberance of his imagination, the warmth and play of his fancy, his profound knowledge of the human heart, his delicate appreciation of its most refined and tender emotions, his familiarity with the workings and counterworkings of its conflicting feelings - in short more entitles him to rank as the Shakespeare of India. "Prof. Lassen calls him "the brightest star in the firmament of Indian poetry".

We thus find that Kalidasa has established his sovereignty in the hearts of all alike. Now it may be asked, 'What is that in Kalidasa which establishes his undisputed claim to the highest honour which is thus bestowed upon him?' Unless this question is satisfactorily answered, Kalidasa's merits as a poet cannot be said to be determined. His poetic genius has brought Sanskrit poetry to the highest elegance and refinement. His style is peculiarly pure and chaste. It has 'neither the laxity of the Puranas nor the extravagant colouring of later poems'. It is unartificial and is characterized by brevity consistent with perspicuity. An unaffected simplicity of expression and an easy-flowing language mark his writings, which are embellished with similes unparalleled for their beauty and appropriateness, and pithy general saying. His diction is marked by the absence of long compounds, involved constructions, overwrought rhetoric, and artificial puns. Kalidasa excels other poets in his description of the sublime and the beautiful. It is a principle recognized by all modern critics that 'Nature must be the life and essence of poetry', and in respect of this, Kalidasa may be said to be essentially a poet of Nature (of course in the limited sense of the term which it is possible to attach to it in those times of gay luxury and general prosperity). He describes with most effective touches the gorgeous scenery of the mountain Himalaya - its snow-clad and mineral covered summits, the peaks where sunshine ever reigns, the fragrant and cool breezes blowing there, the wilds with the hunters, the musk deer, the potent herbs shedding lustre at night, the chamara deer, the Manasa lake etc.: and his description of the Ganges and the peaceful hermitage life is very striking and lifelike. His descriptive powers are great, and some of the scenes in the *Shakuntala*, the

Meghdoot., and the *Raghunamsha* are so enchanting as to hold his readers spell-bound. And as regards suggestive poetry, the kind of poetry which suggests even more than what it expresses, he is a master of acknowledged skill.

16.2 Life of Kalidasa

At the outset it must be admitted that we have absolutely no trustworthy information regarding the personal history of Kalidasa, by universal consent the greatest of Indian poets. The curiosity of the querist who would ask - 'Where and when was he born?' 'Who were his parents?' 'When did he die?' etc. - must ever remain unsatisfied. The poet has studiously observed complete silence about himself in his works. Read them howsoever we may, we find no allusion, no incident mentioned that may directly shed any light either on his personal history or any remarkable event, of his life. In the words of Hazlitt "he was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be". His poetical productions alone stand as an immortal monument of his surpassing poetic excellence. And we must content ourselves with gathering what little information we can about a poet of such world-wide repute from external sources, and a few incidents found here and there in his works, which may be supposed to have a distant bearing upon the history of his life. Reserving for another section the question of the date of the poet, we proceed here to state the few facts that can thus be known about him. A time-honoured tradition, supported by internal and external evidence, associates the name of Kalidasa with that of the epoch making king Vikramaditya of Ujjayini. The keen interest and admiration with which the poet describes the Mahakala, the Sipra and other beauties of Ujjayini, unmistakably point to the conclusion that he must have been a native of that city. And the various covert references to the name of Vikrama in fully eulogistic terms, which are doubtless meant to immortalize king Vikramaditya, are inexplicable if that monarch be not regarded as the poet's patron. Kalidas also betrays considerable acquaintance with court-life in his works. This circumstances, coupled with the fact that there is no allusion in his writings to the goddess of wealth having ever frowned upon him, shows that he was in affluent circumstances, and had not the misfortune of ever drinking the bitter cup of poverty. He was a Brahmana by caste and was a devout worshipper of Shiva, though by no means a sectarian. He seems to have travelled a good deal at least in Northern India. For, as Dr. Bhau Daji remarks, he is the only poet who describes a living saffron-flower, the plant of which grows in Kashmir. His graphic description of the Himalayan scenes looks very much like that of one who was an eye-witness. Unlike Bhavabhuti and many other brother-poets, he appears to have enjoyed great popularity during this lifetime. He was 'an admirer of field-sports, and describes their beneficial effects with the exactness of a true sportsman'. Though fond of pleasures, he was not the unscrupulous voluptuary he is supposed to be by some critics, as is clear from the many noble sentiments expressed in the *Shakuntala*. It also appears from the same play that he was against love-marriages, though always actuated with the most generous sentiments towards the fair sex. His works bears further testimony to his considerable acquaintance with the Vedas, the Upanishads, the *Bhagavadgita*, the Puranas, the systems of the Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta as propounded

by Badarayana, Medicine and the rudiments of Astronomy. Beyond these few facts nothing is known for certain about our poet at present. A few conjectures have been advanced as to some other particulars, but to test their correctness or otherwise falls within the province of the antiquary.

16.3 Works of Kalidasa

As far as the works of Kalidasa are concerned, it is not easy to ascertain them. The poet's silence about himself in his works gave an opportunity to many unscrupulous inferior poets to father their own works upon him. The following is a list of the works generally attributed to him :

- (1) *Abhijnanashakuntalam*
- (2) *Vikrorvashiya*
- (3) *Malavakagnimitra*
- (4) *Raghuvansha*
- (5) *Kumarasambhava*
- (6) *Meghdoot*
- (7) *Kuneshwaradautya*
- (8) *Ritusamhara*
- (9) *Ambastava*
- (10) *Kalyanastava*
- (11) *Kalistrota*
- (12) *Kavyanatakalamkara*
- (13) *Gangastaka I*
- (14) *Gangastaka II*
- (15) *Ghatakarpara*
- (16) *Chandikadandakastrotra*
- (17) *Charchastava*
- (18) *Jyotirvidabharana*
- (19) *Durghatakavya*
- (20) *Nalodaya*
- (21) *Navaratnamala*

- (22)*Pushpabanavilasa*
 (23)*Makarandastava*
 (24)*Mangalastaka I*
 (25) *Mangalastaka I*
 (26)*Mahapadyashataka*
 (27)*Ratnakosha*
 (28) *Rakshasakavya*
 (29)*Lakshmistava*
 (30)*Laghustava*
 (31)*Vidvadinadakavya*
 (32)*Vrindavanakavya*
 (33)*Vaidyamanorama*
 (34)*Shuddhichandrika*
 (35)*Shringaratilaka*
 (36) *Shringarasashtaka*
 (37) *Shringarasarakavya*
 (38) *Shrinkhaladandaka*
 (39)*Shtutabodha*
 (40)*Saptashloki Ramayana and*
 (41)*Setubandha*

Of these the first six plays are acknowledged by all critics to be undoubtedly the works of Kalidasa. The seventh (*Kuneshwaradautya*) has not been yet discovered, but is known only in a quotation by the Kashmirian scholar Kshmedndra in his *Auchityavicharacharcha*. The authorship of (8) *Ritusamhara* is somewhat doubtful; while the remaining ones are certainly to be dismissed as the productions of other poets. In Sanskrit literary history there have been many poets who bore the name Kalidasa, and at least three were known to Rajasekhara . It is possible, therefore, that other Kalidasas than the author of the *Raghuvamsa* are responsible for the trifling pieces mentioned above. Hence we are concerned with the first six only which are 1)*Shakuntala* (2) *Vikrorvashiya* (3) *Malavakagnimitra* (4) *Raghuvansha* (5)*Kumarasambhava* (6) *Meghdoot*. The most convenient and reliable method of studying the development of a poet's mind and its relation to

his productions would be to read his works in their chronological order. But we have no external evidence, whatsoever, to ascertain the chronology of Kalidasa's works. It must therefore, be based wholly on internal evidence.

16.4 Analysis of the Text: *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

16.4.1 Meaning and obliquity of the title

Acarya Kuntaka holds that the title of *kavya* should be replete with a kind of *vakrata*. The title of the work should attract the reader due to its striking meaning. It is because of this reason that a great poet entitles his *kavya* in such a way that it vibrates with strikingness, indicating the tilt being given to it. Kuntaka says that the title does not have merely a ceremonial purpose. The purpose of a good title is to unlock and underline the soul of the work; it enables the reader to know the main idea in either of the ways — symbolic or literal. In a way, it is the skill or art of the poet which Kuntaka calls *namakaraGa-vakrata* (obliquity of title). When the title of the play is *Atha Abhijnanashakuntalam* is put to test we find that it is replete with a kind of obliquity. The title of the play is *Atha Abhijnanashakuntalam*. *Atha* is invariably used at the beginning of Sanskrit works as *iti* is used to mark their close. It has the additional sense of auspiciousness, having first emanated from the throat of Brahma along with the sacred syllable *Aum*. Next the word *abhijnana* in the title signifies 'a token of recognition (in the play this token of recognition is ring) which is instrumental in bringing about the final recognition of Shakuntala by the King. Thus the title of the play has obliquity which Kuntaka calls *namakarana-vakrata* (obliquity of title)

16.4.2 Analysis of the story

The story of the play can be divided into three parts: the Union, the Separation and the Reunion. The union of the lovers in the first three acts marks the end of the first section. The second part i.e. the Separation begins with the fourth act. The third part i.e. the Reunion begins with the discovery of the ring in the sixth act and achieved in the seventh act. A detailed analysis of the story of the play act by act, is given below so that the various topics to be dealt with subsequently will be more readily intelligible to you.

Act I.

After the Benedictory stanza invoking Shiva, the Manager briefly refers to the season, which is *grishma ritu*, and then leaves, adroitly introducing king Dushayanta in full hunting garb, followed by his charioteer. While the king is about to shoot his arrow at an antelope pursued by him, he is interrupted by an ascetic, who informs him that the animal belongs to the *ashrama* of Sage Kanva, and the sanctity of the place must not be violated by its slaughter. The King refrains from killing, and is then invited to receive such hospitalities as the *ashrama* could offer. Sage Kanva is away, but his daughter Shakuntala is there, who would most surely look after the guest's comfort. The King accepts the invitation, and, asking his charioteer to

wait outside, enters the hermitage. There he finds three girls of exquisite loveliness, watering the flowering plants and shrubs; he at once falls in love with Shakuntala who is one of them, the other two being her companions. At a suitable point in their talk the King, who was hitherto concealed in the background, goes forth and addresses them. In the course of the general conversation that ensues, he learns that Shakuntala is Kanva's adopted daughter, being born of Menaka by Vishvamitra and deserted by her natural parents. He thus discovered her to be of Kshatriya parentage, and therefore a suitable bride for him. He, however, does not reveal his true character to them but intends for the present to remain incognito. In the meanwhile, news comes of an elephant running amok and causing damage, and at that the company breaks up. The King departs, head over ears in love, and determined to encamp there and see it through. Shakuntala, too, on her part is struck by the grace and charm of the new visitor.

Act II

The second act introduces the King in a love-sick condition and the Vidushaka, his companion and the privileged court-jester, is trying in his own way to soothe and divert his royal master's mind. The King first of all directs his General to stop the chase and to order his followers not to disturb the hermitage, and then he acquaints the Vidushaka with his having fallen in love, at first sight, with Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of the great Sage Kanva. The King asks his friend to find out some means by which he can manage to stay in the vicinity without arousing comment or suspicion, when his difficulty is solved, quite unexpectedly, by some ascetics coming in and requesting the King to say and look after the safety of their sacrificial rites, which were being disturbed by evil spirits. It proves an opportune and welcome invitation, and the King accepts it. At the same time he sends off the Vidushaka to the capital to be near his royal mother. Now he tells him, with all appearance of sincerity, that the affair of Shakuntala was all a joke, and signified nothing lest he might talk and make his forest-love known to others.

Act III

In the interlude it is stated that Shakuntala, too, is now affected by the malady of love, and is lying on a flower-bed with her two companions ministering unto her cooling remedies. Then the King is introduced in a love-sick condition; and chance leads him near the same bower wherein are seated Shakuntala and her companions. In the course of her conversation with the latter, Sahkuntala confesses her passion for Dushyanta, who takes advantage of this opportunity to make a formal declaration of his suit. At this lovers' union the companions discreetly withdraw but Shakuntala is almost immediately called off by an elderly relative. The disconsolate King finds active work in his accepted occupation of keeping off the evil spirits from the sacrificial altars.

Act IV

During the interval after the last act, Dushyanta has married Sakuntala by the gandharva

form of marriage and has then left for the capital, having promised to send a suitable guard to take his bride to her rightful home, Dushyanta's palace. While Sakuntala is alone in the hermitage, her thoughts being away with her absent husband, she fails to offer proper hospitality to the choleric sage, Durvasa, who comes to the *ashrama* as a guest. The hot-tempered sage curses her with the words - "He of whom thou art thinking, neglecting to receive me properly as a guest - he won't remember you even when reminded (of you)". One of Sakuntala's companions, however, pleads Sakuntala's absentmindedness, and obtains from the sage forgiveness and concession in so far that, the curse would cease to have effect on the production of some token of recognition. (This has an important bearing on the plot, as will be seen later). The two companions say nothing about the curse to anyone; they do not communicate it even to Shakuntala, as they thought it was not advisable to worry her with it, and especially as some token of recognition could easily be produced when the occasion needed it. All this is related in an Interlude. In the act proper, we learn that Kanva has come to know of Sakuntala's marriage and that he has approved of it. In the meanwhile the curse has begun to operate and Dushyanta has completely forgotten everything about his forest-bride. But those in the hermitage are not aware of the effect of the curse. Shakuntala develops signs of pregnancy so they are now prepared to send Shakuntala to her lawful husband. The whole scene depicting her departure from the penance-grove where she had resided so long, and where every plant, creeper and animal was bound to her by ties of affection, is very touchingly portrayed. It contains also Kanva's well-known advice to Shakuntala on the duties of a wife and a daughter-in-law.

Act V

The scene now shifts to Dushyanta's capital. The ascetics escorting Shakuntala, arrive at the royal palace and wish to see the King who, having forgotten everything, calmly orders his chamberlain to admit the party into his royal presence, little suspecting their mission. After an exchange of greetings, Sarangarava, the chief of the sages that accompanied Shakuntala, congratulates the king on his marriage, and invites him to accept his wife as the Queen. The King, to whom all this comes as a complete surprise, denies all knowledge of the affair, and even Shakuntala fails to rouse his curse-swept memory. As a last resort she wants to show him his ring, which he had given her at parting and which would have been a sure token; but, as ill-luck would have it, it had slipped off her fingers during the journey. Mutual recriminations lead to nothing, and she and her party leave the audience-hall. Outside, while she is bemoaning her fate, a celestial lady descends from heaven and carries her away. The King and his courtiers are astonished at this superhuman intervention, which however they are unable to explain; and the curtain drops, leaving the King musing in a gloom of vexatious uncertainty.

Act VI

The ring which Shakuntala had dropped in a pool of water on her journey is discovered inside a fish by a fisherman, whom the police accuse of theft and take him to the King for being properly dealt with. He is of course let off by Dushyanta, who, at the sight of that token of

recognition, is freed from the influence of sage Durvasas's curse. Now he distinctly remembers his marriage with the repudiated Shakuntala and all the details connected with it. He is now deeply grieved, but is helpless. He is closely followed in the course of his sorrow by Sanumati, a heavenly nymph, who is interested in Shakuntala, owing to her connection with Menaka, Sakuntala's mother. The King seeks to divert his mind in the company of his confidant, the Vidushaka, but at every moment he finds his grief harrowing deep down into his soul. And to make matters worse, he receives a letter from his minister, announcing the death of a merchant named Dhanamitra, who dies sonless and whose property, consequently, goes to the royal treasury. This leads him to reflect pensively on his own sonless state, until the grief caused thereby makes him unconscious. A welcome diversion is created at this time by Matali, Indra's charioteer, who arrives with a message from his master to Dushyanta to come and proceed forthwith to do battle with certain troublesome demons, the enemies of the King of gods. Dushyanta assents and leaves in Indra's car to proceed on his expedition.

Act VII

The King is successful in his expedition and is dismissed by Indra after being received with extraordinary honour. While returning through the sky in the car driven by Matali, he alights on the mountain Hemakunta where the holy sage Kashyapa (Maricha) resided, and whom the King wanted to salute reverently — his way. He goes to the hermitage. While Matali is gone to see Kasyapa, King Dushyanta comes across a young boy, the very image of himself, playing with a lion's cub. At his sight the King experiences a strange emotion, as though the boy were his own son. It gradually comes out in the course of a talk with the boy's attendant females that he belongs to the Puru race (Dushyanta's own race) and that his mother's name is Shakuntala. The King now suspects the truth, viz., that most likely the boy is his own son; it is confirmed by the entrance of Shakuntala herself who recognizes her lord. Mutual explanations follow and the pair is reconciled. Kashyapa then enters; he explains the incident of the curse and how it clouded Dushyanata's memory, so that the repudiation was not the King's fault. He pronounces his blessings on the couple and sends them off, together with their son, in that same car of Indra, to their capital where they live ever happily afterwards. The play then ends with the customary stanza of Benediction.

16.4.3 Sources of the Play

The story of the love of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is narrated at length in the Adiparva of the *Mahabharat* and the Svargakhand of the *Padma Purana*. Besides these there are two more possible sources which are Kattabhari Jataka and Pelecritus-story. Of these the version of the *Mahabharata* is decidedly more ancient and deserves consideration first.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

The *Mahabharata* story is too well known to need a detailed narration here. Therein King Dushyanta, losing his way while on a hunting expedition, reaches Kanva's hermitage,

meets Shakuntala alone, learns from her own mouth her descent, impatiently proposes the Gandharva marriage, accepts her condition that her son alone would be his successor, marries her, leaves for his palace, and later on, being afraid of public censure discards her when she arrives there with their son, Sarvadamana, nine years later. The intervention of the Heavenly voice brings about their re-union. The epic-story is rough and prosaic in its treatment of the theme. There are no dramatic situations and no significant mental conflicts. The characters are dull and lifeless. King Dushyanata appears to be an opportunist in love, impatient in his proposal, timid in his heart and void of any ideals. Shakuntala is an outspoken practical girl and lacks womanly grace. Kanva is colourless. The marriage here seems to be a bargain and the story a bundle of absurdities. The potentialities of the theme remain unutilized and the story has hardly any purpose to serve. In brief, the epic-story is no story at all; it is a charmless narration of a string of events.

In this rough, prosaic, dull and lifeless epic-story, Kalidasa has visualised the seeds of his greatest play. Kalidasa has picked up the main thread of the epic-story is the love between Dushyanata and Shakuntala - and has polished it, twisted it with new strings and blended them together with such skill that each is inseparably linked up with the others. Thus he evolved a heart capturing dramatic theme that not only delights the eye, the ear and the heart but also ennobles the reader by leading him to a higher universal philosophical plane.

Kalidasa's world-wide vision was not satisfied with the four characters of the epic-story. Hence he created the two dearest friends of Shakuntala - the smart and mischievous Priyamvada and the sober and discerning Ansuya; Vidusaka, the bosom-friend of the King; Gautami, the wise old matron of the hermitage; choleric Sharangarava and calm Sharadvata, the two pupils of Kanva; the Commander-in-chief; the policemen; the fisherman; the charioteer of the King; Matali, the charioteer of Indira; the Purohita; the door-keeper; Karabhaka, the Queen's messenger; the Apsaras Sanumati; Sages like Vaikhanaasa, Gautama, Narada, Galava and others.; Marica and Aditi; Parabhratika and Madhukarika, the two garden keepers; Caturika, the clever maid servant of the King - and all these appear before us on Kalidasa's wide stage. This is not all. The objects of nature like creepers, flowers, trees etc. and birds and animals like the cuckoo, the rude Bhramara, the peacock, the deer, the pair of Cakravaka birds, the lion's cub etc. also figure in our play not merely as embellishments but as living things. Above all, the ring - an insentient object - appears almost like a living character. Besides, the characters like Durvasas, Queen Vasumati and Queen Hamsapadika leave permanent impression on our minds in spite of their absence from the stage. Thus Kalidasa has given us characters from the forest, from the city, from the heaven, from the nature. This world of characters is not a mass but a group of individuals where each is distinct and vivid in his representation.

The hero and the heroine of the epic-story appear in the play with new flesh and blood, refined feelings and noble thoughts. Dushyanta, no doubt, is romantic in his nature, but at the same time he is noble, conscious of his duties, firm in righteousness, self-controlled, modest in speech, polite in behaviour and tender in heart. Shakuntala is the life of Kanva's

hermitage. She is as innocent as a flower, shy in expressions, affectionate not only towards her friends, but also towards deer and flowers, endowed with a high sense of self-respect, courage to suffer and heart to forgive. The love between these two cannot be a mere bargain settled in a few minutes as in the epic-story. Kalidasa, therefore, in the first three acts, depicts the conflict of emotions and the gradual development of love culminating into marriage. Again, Kalidasa's Dushyanta cannot forget Shakuntala due to the fear of Kanva or of public censure. Hence the dramatist has invented the curse of Durvasa. The interference of the Heavenly voice strikes an unnatural note and therefore Kalidasa with his dramatic insight has invented the right incident. The reunion in our play takes place only after years when the hearts of both Dushyanta and Shakuntala are freed from their narrow vision through the penance in the form of suffering.

Besides the main changes, Kalidasa has also made a number of minor changes e.g. King Dushyanta's entrance into the hermitage alone; Kanva's going to Somatirtha and thus his long absence in the hermitage; Shakuntala's "send-off" immediately after the arrival of Kanva, the two hermits accompanying Shakuntala at the royal palace etc.

The sixth and the seventh acts are Kalidasa's own creation. Thus we find that the epic-story is completely transformed and moulded into an heart-appealing dramatic theme, with such skill that on reading the play one rarely thinks of the epic framework.

The *Padmapurana* and The *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

The *Padmapurana* in its Svarga-khanda gives the story of Shakuntala, which is similar to that of our play, the common points in both being the curse, the ring, Menaka's help, the fisherman and policeman, Dhanamitra's death, Dushyanta's help to Indra, the hermitage of Maricha, the lion's cub etc. This similarity has led some scholars to suppose that Kalidasa was indebted to the *Padmapurana*. Before accepting the above view, the following facts deserve our consideration. The Puranic story of Shakuntala is not the repetition of Kalidasa's play, but it differs in many respects from it. Kanva, in the *Padmapurana* goes out to collect fruits, and Shakuntala gives a long instructive and indignant speech to the king in the royal court. Before going for a bath, Shakuntala gives her ring to Priyamvada, who drops it in a river. The Purana story mentions Sharngarava and Sharadvata, but does not refer to their speeches. The reunion in the Purana is affected by the Sage Kanva who gives the proper introduction of Sarvadamana. These dissimilarities should not be overlooked. Moreover, the date of the Puranas is not indisputably settled. Besides, interpolations in Puranas is a well-known fact and the *Padmapurana* is known to have incorporated the stories from the Post-Puranic literature. The Anandashrama edition of the *Padmapurana* omits the story of Shakuntala. Lastly, it is significant that the story of Shakuntala in the *Padmapurana* shows no familiarity with the language of Kalidasa.

It seems that the author of Shakuntalopakhyaṇa in the *Padmapurana* saw the novel incidents and situations in Kalidasa's play and was therefore tempted to incorporate them in

this story. At the same time he was also keen to have Puranic touches in the story. Hence he narrated Kalidasa's version in the epic form.

The **Kattabhari Jataka** and the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

The Kattahari Jataka gives a story in which the ring plays an important role. The story is as follows :

Once Brahmadata, the king of Benares saw a beautiful woman in a forest. He instantly fell in love with her and married her. Before departing, the King gave his ring to her telling that if a daughter was born, she should sell the ring in order to maintain her and that if a son was born, she should take the child to him with the ring. Later on, the woman with her son presented herself to the King, who, though recognized her, refused to accept her. At last a supernatural act convinced the King who then accepted his wife and his son.

It is supposed that this Jataka story suggested the ring incident to Kalidasa. We must note however that there is no similarity between the ring incident in the Jataka and that in our play. Moreover, it is well known that a ring was often used as a token of recognition and love. Even in the *Ramayana* Rama gives his ring to Hanumana as a token of recognition. Thus Kalidasa might have picked up the idea of the ring from the popular tales and not from any particular story.

Pelecritus-story and the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

In addition to these sources, another possible source may here be referred to. In Greek history, we have the story of a certain king Pelecritus who once threw his ring in the ocean in order to test his future. After six days, the ring was presented to the king by a fisherman, who found it in the belly of a fish he had caught. There is a striking similarity between this story and the incident in Act VI of our play. The actual debt in such cases cannot be definitely ascertained, but it is possible that Kalidasa knew the story. In Act II Vidusaka describes the King as being surrounded by Yavani (i.e. Ionian or Greek women). Kalidasa was a Court-Poet and it is quite possible that he may have picked up this story along with other traditional Greek stories. Thus the ring motif may have been due to the Greek influence.

16.4.4 Development of the Theme

As has already been said the play has three parts. The first which has the union is impregnated with a gradual and logical development of love in the first three acts. The second part consists of the Separation and the Reunion has conflict and meeting with Shakuntala. Let us discuss these parts in order to have the development of the theme of the play.

The Union:

Logical Development of Love

There is a gradual and logical development of love in the first three acts. In Kalidasa, we do not find two lover-meeting, proposing and marrying like practical businessmen as in the epic-story. Here each one is attracted towards the other, but the passion does not make them blind. Dushyanta here controls himself, takes all care to know the details about Shakuntala and only after ascertaining her feelings (from her fake anger) he openly sympathizes with her in his talk with Priyamvada. In the first meeting the two lovers do not exchange a single word. During the first meeting Shakuntala speaks only a few sentences in the King's presence. Yet her silence is eloquent. Her unsteady look at objects other than the King, her eagerness to hear the words of Dushyanta and her longing look have clearly expressed her feelings. In the first act, doubts are dispelled and the beginning is made. In the second act, the overflowing passion of the King's heart, restrained well with nobility and self-respect is depicted. We now have full faith in Dushyanta's feelings and we feel delighted when the sages come and give him an opportunity of meeting Shakuntala. In the third act, Dushyanta himself hears from Shakuntala own mouth that she is in deep love with the King. Dushyanta listens to her love letter. It is only after this verbal and written proof that Dushyanta enters and proposes a love-marriage. Shakuntala also must have noticed Dushyanta's golden bracelet, slipping off from its proper place owing to his weakness. Thus the lovers unite by Gandharva-vivaha only after ascertaining their mutual love and we are also satisfied with this gradual (and not rash) development of love culminating into marriage.

The incidents that confirm the love theme take place gradually and logically. King Dushyanta, modestly dressed, enters the precincts of the hermitage of Kanva. His right arm throbs, indicating good luck; and the King wonders as to what luck he can have in this peaceful Ashrama. Immediately then, on his right, he hears some sounds, and finds three girls watering the trees. He is struck by the beauty of all the three and expresses his surprise to find such beauty in the forest. Being interested, he hides himself behind a tree with a view to listen to their sweet talk. He now learns as to who Shakuntala is and expresses his sympathy for her. Now his interest is concentrated on Shakuntala only. The implications of the comments about the valkala draw his attention to her youth blooming with peerless beauty. This gives rise in his heart to a subconscious desire for her. He therefore hopes that she is born in a caste other than Kanva's. At the same time, his noble heart raises a silent question, - what if she belongs to the Brahamana caste —? But the sub-conscious desire is gaining such a great strength that he confidently declares that in the case of good people, the inclination of the heart is the only authority in matters of doubt. This sub-conscious desire has now so completely overpowered Dushyanata that he not only envies the bee but feels sorry for not being rash. Enraptured by her beauty he forgets his purpose and seizing the opportunity he appears on the scene all of a sudden, without disclosing his identity. He desires to look at them and to talk with them; and so he politely refuses the formalities and cleverly makes all the three ladies sit with him under the Saptaparna tree. Being asked, he introduces himself in an equivocal manner, as he desires to talk with them freely and perhaps also because he is conscious of his own feelings. The presence of these three girls has made the sub-conscious desire to subside a little and now the noble

mind of the King is at work. The doubt (as to whether she is a Kshatriya-born girl or not) that was suppressed with imposing self-confidence, emerges again in his mind. He therefore asks them a few questions and learns the story of the birth of Shakuntala. One doubt is dispelled, but now his mind is seized by another doubt. Is she yet unmarried? He is so much captured by her beauty that he is impatient and curious to know everything about her there and then. So he makes further inquiries and finds that she is not yet married. He is now extremely delighted. Though Dushyanta has other queens also, Providence has not endowed him with a son who would continue his race-and craving for progeny is an important factor in his desire for Shakuntala. The blessing of Vaikhanasa that he would beget a son endowed with qualities like him, combined with the good-omen throbbing of the right arm, goads him on. He is free to fulfil his desire and as he has already seen the love of Shakuntala through her eyes, he is confident too. Shakuntala, information about whom is now cleverly revealed, feigns anger to reveal her love for the King. The self-controlled King restrains himself from the temptation of freer behaviour and does not touch Shakuntala in presence of the other girls, But soon the grip becomes loose, and the King openly describes her palms, her breath that causes tremor in her breasts, the Sirisa flowers on her ears, the perspiration on her cheeks and her loose flowers on her ears, the perspiration on her cheeks and her loose hair. This is not all. In his eager enthusiasm, he offers his own ring. The clever Priyamvada reads the name 'Dushyanta' on the ring, understands the truth and looks mischievously at Sakuntala. On realising his mistake, the King punningly explains away the ring, but witty Priyamvada cleverly indicates the truth revealed to her. The King once again expresses his confidence in his belief that Shakuntala loves him. The shouts of soldiers disturb this meeting. The girls move towards the hermitage but after a few steps Shakuntala turns round under a false pretext and looks at Dushyanta and expresses her feelings through a longing look.

The speech of Vidushaka, in the beginning of the second act, informs us that the thought of Shakuntala has now completely overwhelmed the King. The King cannot sleep. He cannot entertain the thought of leaving the hermitage. He does not find joy in hunting. When alone he thinks of Shakuntala and tries to analyse his own feelings. To Vidushaka he passionately describes Shakuntala. He analyses the behaviour of Shakuntala. He earnestly desires to go to the hermitage, but his noble character and self-respect do not allow him to go there without any proper justification. He readily accepts the invitation of the sages and sends away Vidushaka and, the army to the capital.

In the third act, he expresses the pangs of separation. With hope to meet Shakuntala he goes to the creeper bower on the bank of the river Malini. He finds her there, but does not rush in without confirming her feelings for himself. Therefore he hides himself to listen to the confidential talk of the three girls. Importuned by her friends Shakuntala informs them that she is in deep love with Dushyanta. The friends congratulate Shakuntala for her worthy choice and encourage her to write a love-letter. Shakuntala reads aloud her letter which touches every nerve of Dushyanta's heart so deeply that he discloses himself all of a sudden. The friends

request the King to honour the love of Shakuntala. The King expresses his own love and promises the position of highest honour to Shakuntala. The friends, fully satisfied, leave the lovers alone. Dushyanta offers his services. Shakuntala feels shy and tries to get out of the creeper-bower. Dushyanta boldly touches her for the first time, and restrains her from going. She warns the King to maintain his good manners, and expresses her helplessness. He proposes the 'Gandharva-Vivaha but she does not give her consent. At last, he forcibly lifts up her face for *adhara-pan* (kiss) but the sudden arrival of Gautami confuses both the lovers. The King hides himself. Shakuntala is forced to leave the bower but before leaving it she invites the King for the next meeting.

The Separation :

As we have seen the union of the lovers in the first three acts marks the end of the first section of the play. The fourth marks the beginning of the second part of the theme - the separation of the lovers.

The seed of the separation viz. the curse, is sown in the beginning of the fourth act and the rest of the act prepares the ground for the curse to bear fruit. Kanva returns from the Somatirtha and congratulates his daughter upon her worthy choice. He immediately arranges for the departure of Shakuntala. Shakuntala's friends are busy adorning her. Female ascetics bless her and all of them walk around the sacrificial fire. The blithe notes of the cuckoo signify the consent of the hermitage. Shakuntala embraces Vanajyotsna creeper and consoles the young deer. She listens to her father's message. In the end she embraces her friends and her father and leaves the hermitage her heart heavy with sorrow. No one dreams of the coming calamity as no one except Priyamvada and Anasuya knows the curse. Priyamvada and Anasuya are not allowed to accompany Shakuntala in the royal court. Unfortunately, they place confidence in the ring and hence did not even talk about the curse to Shakuntala. The hint that Shakuntala should show Dushyanta the ring on which his name is inscribed in case he is slow in recognizing her is made in so passing a manner that it evokes no more than flutter of apprehension from Shakuntala. The final fruit of the curse viz. the repudiation of Shakuntala, is seen in the fifth act. It is affected through the conflict between two honest souls - between two truths. Dushyanta and Shakuntala are honest in their conviction and hence the conflict develops.

The Conflict

In order to know how conflict develops, it is now necessary to have few more parts of the story of the play. Sharngarava refers to the marriage that took place between the two equally virtuous persons and requests the King to accept Shakuntala. The King, who does not understand anything at all due to the curse, expresses his surprise. Simple-minded Sharngarava does not understand the real reason of the King's surprise. He feels that Dushyanta is perhaps surprised at their untimely arrival. Hence he explains the behaviour of the world (*lokavrttanta*) to the King. The King now puts a direct and straightforward question, which irritates the choleric pupil of Kanva. Gautami, with her wisdom of age, intervenes and requests Shakuntala

to reveal her face, so that the King may recognise her. King's mind is captured by her beauty and for a moment he makes all possible effort to recollect Shakuntala. Sharngarava interprets the King's silence as his victory and openly taunts the King. The King denies once again and explains his helpless position. He can accept her on the words of sages, but how can he accept her child when he certainly knows himself to be a 'nominal father' only. Sharngarava becomes wild, and calls the King a 'robber'. He also expresses his anger towards Kanva who has been too good to the King. Sharadvata intervenes and tells Shakuntala to give the King a convincing reply. Shakuntala reminds Dushyanta of his noble family by addressing him as a "Paurava". She draws his attention towards his unrighteous behaviour. But the King tells her not to behave improperly. Shakuntala does not lose her self-confidence and she expresses her readiness to show the token. The King is now sure that the hermits are 'staging a play' in front of him. So he taunts not only Shakuntala but the whole womenhood. Shakuntala still has confidence in her heart and so she narrates an incident of the past. To Dushyanta all this - her failure in producing the token and her plan to resort to the narration - appears as a well-managed play and so once again he repeats the remark about the character of Shakuntala. Gautami, the patient lady, gets upset on hearing the King's charge. She politely advises the King. But the King - who now definitely believes that the hermits are playing a "game" with him - tells that ladies are cunning in their nature. He supports his conclusion with a well-known illustration and punningly refers to the loose tiles of Sakuntala's family. This was unbearable for Shakuntala who has a high sense of self-respect and who was honest in her heart. She loses her temper and calls the King 'Anarya' and a 'hypocrite'. Even Dushyanta feels for a moment that she is correct. But he has faith in his own convictions and therefore proudly refers to his unstained fame. Shakuntala is defeated on all her counts; she has now lost every hope and therefore she weeps helplessly. Sharngarava again loses his temper, blames Shakuntala for irresponsible behaviour and taunts the King indirectly. Dushyanta requests Sharnagarava not to taunt him indirectly, but the choleric Sharngarava gets more wild and scorns the King. Dushyanta wants to convince Shakuntala about his honesty and in order to prove his honesty he asks a poignant question to Sharngarava. Now Sharngarava's anger becomes uncontrollable and hence he bursts out with the curt reply. Sharadvata, the coolheaded pupil of Kanva, sees no point in arguing further and therefore he advises his pupil-brother to return. The two pupils and Gautami turn around for leaving. Helpless Shakuntala follows the hermits with tears in her eyes. Gautami, the mother, looks behind and finds her daughter lamenting in the most pitiable condition. She pleads for Shakuntala, but the indignant Sharngarava has no sympathy for her. He firmly tells Shakuntala that for her even slavery at her husband's place is better. Dushyanta feels that the sages are playing a trick with him. He suspects that they are thinking that Dushyanta, being tempted by her beauty, will accept Shakuntala privately. But he confidently tells them that such timidity and immoral inclination is not in his blood. Sharngarava points out to Dushyanta his unrighteous action. But the King tells Sharngarava to advise him.

It is noteworthy that throughout this conflict, Dushyanta controls his temper, but being smart and confident, he seizes every opportunity of taunting the hermits. Three times the conflict

reaches its climax : first, when Sharngarava bursts out in temper at the direct question of Dushyanta. Secondly, when Sharngarava calls the King a 'robber' and thirdly, when Sharngarava fails to advise the King in the matters of 'Gurulaghava'. Thus choleric Sharngarava is the 'life' of the conflict and thrice he leads it to a climax. But for all the three times, the tense situation is saved by the intervention of Gautami, Sharadvata and Purohita respectively. Shakuntala's patience is skilfully delineated here. She does not lose her courage at the King's repudiation. Controlling her feelings, she politely and patiently tries her best to remind Dushyanta of the earlier incidents. She blames her misfortune, for her failure and never utters a word against her husbands. Only once - and that too when Dushyanta passes a remark about her morals, and the morals of her family - she loses her temper and calls her husband 'Anarya'. Thus this conflict arrests our mind in spellbound attention, as it is a conflict between two truths, between two honest souls and not between truth and untruth.

The Reunion :

Realization of the Fact

The Discovery of the ring in the sixth act paves the way for the Re-union. The King is now deeply immersed in sorrow. He forbids the celebration of the spring festival in his garden. He cannot bear the sight of mango-blossoms. He remembers the helpless look of Shakuntala and that burns every coil of his heart. Forgetting the discrimination in things, he loudly rebukes the ring. He tries to divert his mind by looking at the picture of Shakuntala. He loses his consciousness when he becomes conscious of his childlessness. But amidst all this he performs his royal duties with proper care. He does justice to his duties by accepting the invitation of Indira.

Meeting with Shakuntala

After receiving the highest honour from Indira, Dushyanta awaits the opportunity of paying his respects to Sage Maricha, on the Hemakuta mountain. He looks closely at Sarvadamana and feels affection for him as for his own son. He finds the boy as a seed of great luster. He observes the marks of a sovereign King on the palm of Sarvadamana. He is then, informed that the boy, who is similar to him in appearance, is born of the Puru race. He also learns that the mother of Sarvadamana is related to an Apsaras, and also that she is abandoned by her husband. He indirectly learns the name of the mother of the young boy. His success in touching the amulet convinces him, that Sarvadamana is his own son. Now enters Shakuntala, emaciated through the practice of vows, wearing a pair of dusky garments and having a single braid of hair. The son introduces Dushyanta to his mother and thus the re-union is achieved.

16.5 Let Us Sum Up

Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is the most popular and very widely read in all parts of India. It is a love drama and belongs to that class of Rupaka which is known as Nataka. Its subject is taken from history in its main outlines. This single play has so much of

the poet's genius displayed in it that we need not go to his other works to establish the superiority of Kalidasa's muse. It aims at giving realistic picture of the life of the people in a marked degree. The usual expedient employed by writers of erotic plays viz., the introduction of a rival wife or wives, to give variety to the action and add interest to the incidents by the unwelcome interruptions in the love meeting of the hero and heroine is not made use of in the present play. Its language exhibits all the graces of his style: it is highly elegant being dignified where necessary; it abounds in striking and tasteful comparisons. It is sublime in the poetical portions without becoming obscure or involved and presents a most charming ease and simplicity in the dialogues without ever descending to vulgarism. No forced constructions. No offensive conceits mar its beauty. The meters are mostly of the shorter kind, very musical and varied with the sonorous Arya prominent among them. It is also highly finished from the artistic point of view. The action is progressive and the interest remains sustained. Wilson's remark—"the story, the situations and the characters are all highly imaginative and nothing can surpass the beauty and justice of many of the thoughts" unfolds the character of the play.

16.6 Review Questions

1. Justify the title of the play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.
2. Write a note on the plot construction of the play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.
3. Which of the two Acts—the fourth and the fifth in the *Abhijnanashakuntalam* – appeals to you the most. Discuss giving reasons.
4. Discuss how far the changes introduced by Kalidasa in the original story of the *Mahabharata* have improved the plot of the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.

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UNIT-17

KALIDASA : ABHIJNANSHAKUNTALAM (II)

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2. Analysis of the play
 - 17.2.1 Imagination and fancy
 - 17.2.2 *Rasa* (aesthetic sentiment)
 - 17.2.3 *Arthaprakritis*
 - 17.2.4 Characterization
 - 17.2.4.1 Dushyanta
 - 17.2.4.2 Shakuntala
 - 17.2.5 Key episodes
 - 17.2.5.1 Curse of Durvasa
 - 17.2.5.2 Ring Episode
 - 17.2.6 Nature in the play
- 17.3 Let Us Sum up
- 17.4 Review Questions
- 17.5 Bibliography

17.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of various aspects of the, *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*. The unit focuses on how Kalidasa's creative faculty works in

- modifying source story
- creating events
- arousing rasa* (aesthetic sentiment)
- weaving *arthaprakritis* (plot and stages) and *sandhis* (junctures)
- developing his characters

17.1 Introduction

The *Abhijnana-Sakuntalam* is a play in seven Acts, based on the well-known love-story of king Dushyanta and the maiden Shakuntala, as given in the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. The scene of the first four acts is laid at Kanva's hermitage at the foot of the Himalayas, and later it shifts to the capital, Hastinapura (Acts V. - VI.), and finally to Maricha's hermitage on the Hemkuta mountain. The principal points in the development of the plot of the play are :

1. the introduction of Dushyanta into the penance-grove of Kanva;
2. the mutual love-at-first-sight of Dushyanta and Sakuntala;
3. their gandharva marriage;
4. the curse of Durvasas with its disastrous result;
5. the departure of Sakuntala for Hastinapura;
6. the loss of the token-ring;
7. the repudiation of Sakuntala and her being carried away to a celestial asylum;
8. the discovery of the ring and the consequent agony of the King on recovering his memory;
9. Dushyanta's journey to heaven and back again in Indra's car;
10. his unexpected meeting with a refractory boy in the hermitage of Marich;
11. the search for the amulet by which the boy is proved to be his son;
12. the meeting with Sakuntala; and (13) the happy union of the lovers in the end.

17.2 Analysis of the play

17.2.1 Imagination and fancy

The story of the love of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is narrated at length in the Adiparva of the *Mahabharata*, and also in the Svargakhanda of the *Padmapurana*. Of these the version of the *Mahabharata* is decidedly more ancient and deserves consideration first. Here the story is so unromantic and simple in its form that one would scarcely imagine that it could be made the basis of the dramatic incidents as woven in the play, which for the plan of its execution and the charm of its *denouement*, hardly finds a parallel in the dramatic literature of India. The skeleton of the story into which the poet has breathed life and animation goes like thus:

Dushyanta, a king of the lunar race, in the course of his hunting excursion, reached the

hermi-tage of Kanva, whose adopted daughter, Shakuntala, being alone in the house, had to entertain the King, as was wont with the sages in those times. The King was fascinated by the matchless charms of the sage's daughter, from whom he learnt the story of her birth, parentage, etc. and whose Kshatriya origin made it possible for him to marry her. Without much ceremony the King expressed his desire to her to which she yielded on his promise to appoint her son as his successor. He then wedded her by the *gandharva* form of marriage, and having stayed with her for some time returned to his capital. Being afraid of the sage's anger without whose knowledge the connexion had been formed and who was sure to pronounce a curse if displeased with the match, the King did not send for his new wife. The sage, however, knowing what had happened in his absence, approved of the choice of his daughter who was in course of time delivered of a son, and sent her to her husband without waiting for the King's message. Dushyanta, however, afraid of the public censure, discarded her; but a heavenly voice enjoined him to receive his wife and son, and Shakuntala was soon raised to the dignity of the chief or crowned Queen.

This prosaic story lacks the dramatic elements which give effect and life to a play. It has been dramatized by Kalidasa with that dramatic skill and mastery over his art which have made him immortal as the Shakespeare of India. Both the dramatists— Shakespeare and Kalidasa—share one strange similarity in their lives. Shakespeare has nowhere originated the main plots of his dramas, but in his hands they received life and meaning and made him what he is—the unrivalled master of his art. Kalidasa too, selected a mythological love-story to serve as the basis of his drama, fully conscious that such a story would have greater charm for his countrymen.

This kind of device employed in the text is called episodic obliquity by Kuntaka in his *Vakrotijivitam*. This *vakrata* deals with the oblique use of *prakarana* (episode). Kuntaka says that when the intended object is capable of maintaining suspense all along and is the product of the unique, boundless poetic skill underlying it, we have *prakarana -vakrata* (episodic obliquity). Here he means to say is that the writer, overwhelmed with the zest of creation, creates an alluring charm in the subject - matter. According to him, this very charm is nothing but *prakarana -vakrata*. He describes the following nine sub-varieties of this *vakrata* : *bhavapurnasthiti vakrata* (obliquity of emotional states), *utapadya lavanya vakrata* (obliquity of modified source story), *prakarana upakarya-upakaraka bhava vakrata* (obliquity of episodic relationship), *vishishtha prakarna vakrata* (obliquity of particular event and episode), *angirasa nishyandanikasa vakrata* (obliquity of dominant *rasa*), *apradhana prasanga vakrata* (obliquity of secondary episodes), *prakaranâtara vakrata* (obliquity of play within play), *sandhi vinivesha vakrata* (obliquity of juncture)

Kalidasa made use of *utapadya lavanya vakrata* (obliquity of modified source story). His poetic genius, aided by his deep dramatic insight quickly saw that the story though simple and unromantic in its form. It was pre-eminently fitted to be the nucleus of such dramatic situations and incidents as would stir up the hearts of the reader and produce a magical effect

upon him. And who can say that he was wrong in his selection? If the reader reads this matchless drama again and again, it never loses its charm for him. He relishes it with renewed taste, his soul remains uplifted as he proceeds. The play becomes so much enraptured with its beauties that it is held fast as by a spell and is soon lost in the greater soul of the dramatist. Goethe's words that 'the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted and fed', are literally true to this illustrious production of Kalidasa.

A great writer must possess the faculty of imagination in an eminent degree. The present play of Kalidasa amply proves this quality. It is this faculty of imagination which enabled him to body forth the forms of things unknown, to turn them to shapes and give to airy nothing—the meager story of the *Mahabharata*—its form and the existence. The following additions, by which the skeleton was made to move and rise into life, are all the creation of his imagination. In the original, Shakuntala herself narrates the history of her birth to the King, and their choice-marriage presents no difficulty to them. As the author of the *Mahabharata* merely intended to relate a story belonging to past history, he did it in that simple and dry manner. But it certainly required a change to have a dramatic effect. As Kalidasa created two female characters, a work solely of his versatile imagination, as the friends and confidantes of Shakuntala, the heroine of the play. They are not in the original story as given in the *Mahabharata*. This contrivance, wonderful on account of its very simplicity, has made the entire situation so dramatic and charming that it touches the heart of even the reader. The guileless and simple life of these girls, their innocent playfulness, the frankness of their minds, and above all their sincere and disinterested friendship—all these, introduced with great skill at the very beginning of the play. The introduction of these characters largely enhance its beauty and produce a most pleasing effect on the mind of the reader. From the very commencement the reader feels that he breathes purer air of the pristine times of Aryan India. The soul of the reader, as it comes into contact with the purer life of the ancient Rishis, feels itself greatly ennobled. The King, before he meets the girls face to face, is skilfully introduced into the penance-grove and thus given an opportunity to watch them engaged in one of the most agree-able duties of hermitage life, and in a sweet conversation, which gradually unfolds some of the incidents connected with their lives, particularly with that of Shakuntala. Here the poet has put in the King's mouth some of the most charming sentiments common to humanity. The King was instantly struck with the peerless beauty of Shakuntala (Act I.); his passion, however, is not fully revealed at once, but is gradually disclosed with the greatest dramatic skill, thus rendering the situation highly interesting. The poet's dramatic ingenuity is again seen in the manner in which the conversation between the King and the maidens, after their meeting, is conducted. Here the friends of the heroine are made the spokeswomen, the agitated state of the former's mind and her bashfulness being delightfully delineated. The poet's profound knowledge of human nature has manifested itself in all this.

These are not the only instances of the operation of Kalidasa's imaginative faculty. For excepting the central story of the drama, his imagination pervades the entire construction of the play. In the original, Shakuntala promises to wed Dushyanta by the *gandharva* form of

marriage on the condition that their son should be recognized as the heir-apparent. Kalidasa has dispensed with this making of a bargain. In the original, Shakuntala is not sent to Dushyanta in a pregnant condition, but she stays in Kinnva's *asrama* where she gives birth to a son. In the original story when her son is six years old, she is sent to her husband. Again, in the original Dushyanta deliberately pretends ignorance of his marriage and repudiates Shakuntala. He accepts her only after their true relation is established by a declaration in a speech from the celestial regions (*akashvani*). This meant a stain on his character, which Kalidasa has ingeniously and successfully avoided in the play. It may be safely said that this play is, in the main, the production of the imaginative faculty of Kalidasa. The curse of the sage Durvasa, the loss of the ring in the *tirtha*, and the consequent forgetfulness of the King—these incidents owe their birth to Kalidasa's creative genius. For a time these incidents enhance the tragic effect of the drama. The last two acts are purely original.

The above account shows that Kalidasa's imaginative faculty is of the highest kind. Let us now see how his fancy at work. There are many incidents which are dexterously interwoven in the construction of the play:

—the pursuit of Shakuntala by a bee and her consequent flurry which skilfully made the fit occasion for the King to make his appearance in Act I.

—the seizure of the skirts of her garment by a fawn (Act IV.),

—the singing in the beginning of Act V which indirectly hints at the forgetting by the King of his former wife and which makes him as though love-lorn though he could not account for the cause,

—the unexpected recovery of the ring, the picture of the Heroine and the consequent mental state of the King (Act VI.),

—the soliloquy and the swoon of the King on hearing of the death of a rich merchant who died childless (Act VI.)

All these incidents which play an important role in the construction of the play, are the production of the fertile fancy of the poet. The *denouement* of the drama in all its chief and subordinate parts is so gracefully conceived and sustained throughout that the stage-effect in all its various forms is maintained on the audience, and the different sentiments (*rasas*) possess the soul and keep it entranced. There is perfect naturalness about the dramatic incidents; they gently rise up in the progress of the plot and all tend to make the play a perfect creation. The *Abhijanashakuntalam* is thus the climax of the poetic and dramatic power of Kalidasa.

17.2.2 Rasa (aesthetic sentiment) of the play

The *Abhijanashakuntalam* does not appear to have been written with the strictest

attention to all canons of Sanskrit dramaturgy. However, the ancient writers, Bharata and Kuntaka have been followed in relation to the general conditions given by them. Let us see how the present play satisfies the general conditions in relation to *rasa*. and *arthaprakritis* which consists of plot and other elements

According to the ancient theorists each of us is fitted with a built-in structure of '*sthayi bhavas*' or basic mental states which are the modified forms of basic drives or instincts as a result of centuries of evolutionary process of humanization and social living. These '*sthayi bhavas*', which are chiefly eight in number, are heightened to a relishable state called '*rasadasha*' by the poet so that we have one *rasa* or emotion corresponding to each of them. It is through the conjunction of the constituents *rasa-prapanca* (paraphernalia of *rasa*) that the poet activates, with some kind of empathetic induction, the propensity of 'rati in the reader and the movement it is consummated, the *sahridaya* (sensitive reader) experiences an afflatus or transport which is designed as *rasa*. The poet succeeds in doing this by resorting to the devices of concretization. Eliot's 'objective correlative' appears to be a direct modern version of the *rasa* formula of Bharata. The entire poetic mechanism, as stressed in the *rasa-sutra*, is oriented towards enabling the emotional content to be realized and recaptured by the *sahridaya* or a gifted reader. This is also the purpose of Eliot in formulating the concept of 'objective correlative'. In his essay on "Hamlet", Eliot formulates a canon of the portrayal of an emotion in poetry. He states: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative", in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

As Bharata has put it in his *Natyashastra* : "*vibhavanubhavavyabhicharisamyogata rasanishapattih*" The savouring of the emotion is possible through the combination or integration of these elements: '*vibhava*', '*anubhava*' and '*vyabhichari bhava*'. '*Vibhavas*' are of two kinds: '*alamban*' and '*uddipan*'. Under *alamban* are included such persons or objects that are the occasion of feelings as well as those in whom those feelings are generated. In Kalidas's play the forest maiden, Shakuntala as well as the infatuated king is '*alamban*.' By '*uddipan*' are meant such features or circumstances that accentuate the feelings of '*alamban*, which, in effect, would mean the hero or the heroine. The sylvan surroundings or the spring season will easily serve as '*uddipan*' for the erotic emotion or 'rati'. '*Anubhavas*' signify the various gestures expressive of what is going on in the heart or the mind of main characters, like casting a terrified glance, heaving a sigh or involuntarily shedding a tear. Then there are ancillary feelings which go along with and consequently reinforce prevailing mood or emotional disposition. These supporting feelings are called '*vyabhicharis*' or '*sancharis*' because they are short lived and they can enter into alliance with a number of '*sthayi bhavas*'. The enduring passion in Dushyanta's heart is 'rati' or longing for Shakuntala, he is, however, continually subject to such *vyabhicharis* as '*ullas*', (exihilaration), '*chupalata*' (fickle mindedness), and '*vyakulata*', (nervousness).

17.2.3 *Arthaprakritis*

Plot and other elements

The plot (*vastu*) of the play are of two kinds (a) *adhikarik* (principal) (b) *prasangik* (accessory). The *adhikarik* (principal) is the plot that relates to the chief characters or the persons concerned with the essential interest of the piece and pervades the whole arrangement. The *prasangik* (accessory) plot is the plot that which appears in furtherance of the main topic and is concerned with characters other than hero or heroine. The *prasangik* (accessory) plot has further two sub-kinds (i) *pataka* (banner), an episode by which the progress of the plot is illustrated and (ii) *prakari*, an episodic incident of limited duration and minor importance. Other elements requisite for the development of the plot (i) *bija* (the seed) (ii) *bindu* (the drop) (iii) *karya* (the final issue). The *bija* (seed) is the circumstance leading to the ultimate end briefly stated. as the plot develops. It bears multifarious results with the development of the plot. In a word, it works as the seed of the plot. The *bindu* (the drop) is what cements a break in the plot caused by the introduction of some other incident. The *karya* (the final issue) is the final object of the plot which being attained the whole is finished. Technically these five—two kinds of plot and three elements—are called *arthaprakritis*.

Stages (*avasthas*) and Junctures (*sandhis*)

As regards the development of plot, a dramatic plot has five *avasthas* (stages): (i) *arambh* (commencement), *yatna* (endeavour), *pratyasa* (prospect of success), *niyatapti* (certainty of success through the removal of obstacles and *phalagama* (attainment of desired fruit). While these five stages are in progress, there must be some links to connect them with the principal and subordinate parts of the main episodes and incidents. These links are called *sandhis* (junctures). It marks the division of the dramatic actions. Indian âcâryas call them as *mukha sandhi* (portasis or opening juncture), *prati-mukh—sandhi* (epitasis), *garbha-sandhi* (catastasis), *avamarœ* or *vimarsha-sandhi* (peripateia) and *nirvahan-sandhi* (catastrophe). Kuntaka says that the junctures should be arranged in accordance with the *rasa* and the matter should be modified accordingly. It is generally held that the formation of junctures depends upon different stages of action – *arambha* (commencement), *yatna* (endeavour), *pratyasha* (prospect of success), *niyatapti* (certain attainment through the removal of obstacles) *phalagama* (certainty of success and attainment of fruit). The *mukha sandhi* (portasis or opening juncture) is the combination of *bija* (the seed) and *arambha* (commencement), wherein the seed is shown with all its *rasas*. In the *prati-mukh—sandhi* (epitasis) there is the means *yatna* (endeavour) to the chief end, as originally implied by the *bija* (the seed) in the *mukha sandhi* (portasis or opening juncture) which herein sprouts up. In the *garbha-sandhi* (catastasis), there is attainment and no attainment of the desired end, implying a further sprouting up of the original *bija* (the seed). There are impediments, but the

main plot gains ground under resistance. In the *avamarœi* or *vimarsha-sandhi*(peripateia) the *bija* (the seed) attains a more luxuriant growth than in the *garbha-sandhi*, (catastasis) being accompanied by *niyatapti* (certain attainment through the removal of obstacles) of the end, but whose final result is postponed further off by fresh impediments of various sort. The *nirvahan-sandhi* (catastrophe) or consummation is the harmonious combination of all the aforesaid of the final catastrophe.

Illustration from the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

The play begins with the benediction. At the end of the prelude, Dushyanta, hero of *dhirodatta* class, begins the play. The *mukha-sandhi* commences and ends with Act II. It brings together the hero and the heroine and love strikes root in the hearts of both. Their union in marriage is the final object, and the whole machinery is to be directed towards its achievement. The ground for the seed is prepared when the Yaikhanasha says to the King "May you get a son" and it is cast when he further the King about the departure of Kanva Rishi "just having entrusted to his daughter, Shakuntala" The *prati-mukha-sandhi* commences with the interaction between the King and Madhavya, king's confidential companion when the former considers the latter unfortunate for not seeing the beautiful Shakuntala and terminates with the close of the Act III. We have the *bindu* (the drop) in that the stream of the main action, though obstructed by such incidents as the talk about the chase, the double call of duty requiring the King's attendance on the queen mother and his presence at the hermitage to ward off the obstacles to the holy rites and proceeds unhindered, as is implied by the words of the King "Madhavya, You have not seen the fruit of your eyes." We have the *yatna* (endeavour) for the principal end when the King says to Vidushaka in the Act II, "Friend, some of the sages have recognized me, think therefore, under what pretext I may again visit the hermitage." The *garbha-sandhi* (catastasis) takes up the whole of Act IV and extends as far as the instructions passed by Gautami to Shakuntala when the king refuses to recognize her in the fifth Act. It consists of the curse of Durvasas which mars the hope of success which, however, is still present in the words of Kanva who says to Shakuntala in the Act IV, "Placed in the honorable position of the wife of a husband of a noble birth....you will not mind the separation from me." The *avamarœi* or *vimarsha-sandhi*(peripateia) spreads over the remainder of the Act V and the whole of the Act VI. Here the certain attainment of the desired end is thwarted by the curse of Duvasas taking effect and the King's becoming oblivious of his marriage with Shakuntala. The way to the final catastrophe, however, is paved by the invitation of Indra. The *nirvahan-sandhi* (catastrophe) occupies the last Act wherein the various diverging incidents converge to one end, viz., the happy union of the King with his Queen and son.

17.2.4 Characterization

Kalidasa is a representative of ancient Indian culture and a great upholder of social moral values, in the light of which he leads his characters to perfection. He is a great lover of humanity and to him man is the best creation and so men are happier than men in heaven. The poet brings common people face to face with gods, kings and priests. He moulds the life of

people by presenting idealistic characterization. Thus he aims at perfection rather than characterization. He depicts his heroes and heroines as what they would be and not what they really are.

17.2.4.1 Dushyanta

King Dushyanta is a *dhiroddata* Hero who is represented in the play as possessed of almost all the qualities which form the connotation of such a hero. He appears to be young, between thirty and thirty-five, as is shown by his ardent longing for chase, which requires youthful energy.

King Dushyanta is made the romantic hero of the play. His love-lorn condition, so pathetically described in the third and sixth acts, again proves this quality. His first appearance in the first act makes an imposing impression upon Priyamvada. Priyamvada says to Anasuya, "Anasuya, who can this be, who intelligent and dignified in mien, and speaking sweetly and agreeably, appears to be possessed of majesty." This shows that he was youthful, handsome, majestic and of sweet address.

The next important quality in Dushyanta's character is the extreme nobility of his mind. It can be explicitly seen in his love for Shakuntala. He was youthful and had in his favour the royal custom, which sanctioned polygamy in the case of kings. True that he was not a rigid monogamist; but it must be conceded to his honour that he was not a reckless libertine. He was fully imbued with the high principles of moral conduct, and he never manifests any-time the least symptom of illicit and lewd passion. It was quite natural for him to be struck with the fascinating youth and superb charms of the Heroine (Act I. 16, 17); but as a man of honour he wished to ascertain whether Shakuntala was married or even betrothed. He checked his first burst of love till that time, though he was so confident of his nobility that he was pretty surely convinced of the "legality of the connexion" (I. 20) It is only after ascertaining the real parentage of Shakuntala, and further that she was not married, that he allows his mind to harbour the feeling of love (I. 25). His subsequent speech proves the same nobility of his mind.

Another feature of Dushyanta's character is his utmost respect for the sages and great solicitude for their comfort. The King, though himself commanding universal respect, feels unbounded reverence for the sages and his conduct is marked by a proper sense of what their austere lives deserve at the hands of worldly men. The first instance of this respect is seen when the King withdraws his arrows. Other instances are seen in the first act of the play which demonstrates King's respect for the sages.

Another praise-worthy feature of Dushyanta's character is his general nobility of mind and moral rectitude. His regard for his mother shown in Act II is a good example of this feature. His general nobility of mind and moral rectitude can be demonstrated from the incidents in Act V also.

His lofty sense of regal duties does the highest credit to the greatness of his mind. His

proclamation shows his regard for the subjects' weal, and his order to his minister about the disposal of Dhanamitra's property bears testimony to his anxiety not to enrich his treasury by unjust means. There are incidents in the play which testify to his high martial power. He was the bravest of the brave, so much so that even Indra, the lord of the gods, sought his help in Act II.

The King's love for Shakuntala though sensual to a certain extent, is deep-rooted and permanent. His mental affliction, after the unconscious dismissal and rejection of the Heroine, is so touching as to give a full idea of what his real feelings were (Act VI). The King was highly cultured. His remarks are so thoughtful and weighty that they bespeak a very high degree of refinement. He has an observant eye which marks the beauty of natural subjects. His acquaintance with many of the fine arts is thorough. He can appreciate music and be sensible to its impressions. He shows a deep knowledge of painting. In short, he is depicted in such colours as make him quite worthy of the honour. He is a typical sovereign, and the various traits of his character are shown in bold relief by the poet. His picture is thus interesting and noble, and completely fulfils the expectations raised by the poet's genius.

17.2.4.2 Shakuntala

Shakuntala, the heroine of the play, is a beautiful picture of womanhood. She is the daughter of the sage Viswamitra and the heavenly nymph Menaka. She was abandoned by her parents in a forest, where she was fed by birds before she was carried by Kanva and brought up as his daughter. Brought up, amidst hermitage-environments and among men leading ascetic lives, she too had imbibed the spirit of that life. She thus presents the picture of a damsel influenced by higher forces which greatly moulded her life. In a word, she is an incarnation of human qualities.

First quality of Shakuntala to be mentioned is her picture of womanhood. As a person, she had more than human beauty. She had heavenly beauty inherited from her mother. It would not be an exaggeration to call her a paragon of beauty. The irresistible charms of her exceptional loveliness fascinated the heart of the king whose several descriptions point to the same.

Shakuntala was not an ordinary girl. She was a youthful maiden between fifteen and eighteen with full development of her limbs. There was nothing artificial in her beauty. It was essentially natural and free from coquettish trappings of which she had no conception. This proves the handsomeness of her external person, but her heart was equally beautiful. She was a lovely young maiden, the soul of womanly modesty, and altogether insensible to the influence of passion till she saw the King. Her life, therefore, was one of feminine purity of mind and of womanly virtues. Her womanly virtues were greatly due to the general surroundings amidst which she lived. It is noteworthy here that the general surroundings characterized her nature throughout her life, though a change was effected in its relations by her married condition. Her modesty was so great that ever since the time when she felt herself invaded by a feeling which was strange to her in her hermit-life, she kept it concealed even from her dearest friends.

(Act I). She observed this quality till her love-affected condition and the entreaties of her friends forced her to reveal it to them. (Act III). So far she presents an illustration of the Aryan female modesty. When encountered by her lover she is again the same picture of womanly modesty, peculiar to Hindu women, as seen in the latter part of Act III . Though troubled by the arrows of Cupid she showed a full sense of female honour. Her speeches prove her lively sense of feminine dignity and her respect for her elders. This raises her character immensely in the eyes of the reader.

When wedded to the King by the legal form of marriage, she presents another interesting side of Hindu woman-hood. Though openly discarded by the King and though for a time justly angry with him, she does not in the least lose her affection for her lord, and does not forget her duties as a married woman towards him. She leads an ascetic's life during her separation, ever keeping the image of her beloved husband in her heart (Act VII).

Shakuntala possesses a kind and sympathetic nature. Her kind and sympathetic nature manifests itself in her affection for the trees of the penance-grove and the animals. She has learnt to love the whole creation. The references in Act I make this clear. Her affection for her father was also unbounded, as is seen in Act IV/. The friendship, or even sisterly affection, that existed between her and her two friends is another attractive trait of her character. Thus the picture of Shakuntala, as delineated by Kalidasa, is one of his masterpieces.

17.2.5 Key Episodes

17.2.5.1 Curse of Durvasa

The Curse of Durvasa is an important event of the play. Without this curse the play will go into fiasco. It is this curse that makes the play move on. It changes the fate of the main characters of the play and thus event take place. Therefore, it would be in the fitness of the things to make a critical analysis of this event to understand the play in its proper perspective. The curse affect the lives of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. Hence it is important to about the lives of these characters.

Dushyanta has shown great self-control in the first meeting. He has taken care to know all the necessary details about Shakuntala He has carefully ob-served Shakuntala's feelings and analysed his own. He has learnt from Shakuntala's own mouth that she loves him. The love-letter is a written proof. Dushyanta is requested by her friends to take care of her delicate feelings. It is only after he is convinced that the love is mutual that the King proposes to her and acts some-what more freely. He has maintained his self-respect and nobility. He has performed his duty towards the sages.

Similarly, Shakuntala, too, is innocent. In the first meeting, the bashful girl does not even talk to the King. She utters only a few short sentences in his presence. She simply “ looks “ at the King, but does not ‘invite’ him. In the third act, she reveals her feelings for the King

only when importuned by her friends. She writes a simple love-letter when her friends persuade her to do so. She warns the King to maintain his good manners. She does not readily accept the proposal of *gandharva-vivaha*. She waits for her friends' advice in the matter.

Now the question arises why, then, should Dushyanta and Shakuntala suffer at all? Why has the curse acted so mercilessly towards the innocent Shakuntala? In spite of their carefulness and nobility, the curse affects Dushyanta and Shakuntala; and Kalidasa has shown that it comes not as a heavenly mishap, but as a natural consequence of some mistake on the part of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. In fact, the roots of the curse are to be found in the un-fortunate errors of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Hence, it is indispensable to underline the errors committed by them.

Shakuntala was all alone in her hermitage. Her duty was to welcome the guests with due formalities. Instead, she met an attractive man and fell in love with him. She is not to be blamed for this. She is young, and therefore her falling in love with a man, and that too, a personality like Dushyanta is not unnatural. She agrees to the *gandharva-vivaha* after consulting her two friends. No doubt, it is her moral duty to take her father's consent, and she is keen on it. But Dushyanta assures her that the consent of Kanva could be taken for granted and encourages her by referring to, instances of love-marriages, in the past. There is no wonder, then, if the innocent Shakuntala puts her faith in Dushyanta's words and agrees to the marriage. But after the King's departure from the hermitage, she forgets all her duties. She is so completely engrossed in her thoughts about Dushyanta that she does not even notice the great sage Durvasa, who comes there and announces himself. Love has made her blind to her duties and also to the world. Durvasa is a Maharsi and has come of his own accord to the hermitage, The opportunity of welcoming such a distinguished guest is rare, and yet Shakuntala failed even to notice him. It was her duty to welcome the guests. She has welcomed the first guest—the King—with all love, and now, when the second guest—Maharsi Durvasa—arrives, she neglects her duty. She is now a married lady. In a few days she will be the Chief Queen and in a few months mother of a Cakravartin.

Dushyanta, though self-restrained and noble, has not acted with all proper consideration. He has come to the hermitage to pay homage to Kanva; but on seeing Shakuntala he falls in love with her and does not even inquire about Kanva's health or penance. The purpose for which he came remains unfulfilled. He is a King, and he should not have been so impatient about the *gandharva vivaha*. It is his moral duty also to inform Kanva. It is true that the *gandharva-vivaha* was popular in those days, but at the same time he should have known that Shakuntala was not independent and free. Shakuntala as a matter of fact herself informs him as much. Moreover, she has as her guardian a great sage like Kanva, famous for his penance. It is altogether improper for Dushyanta to show utter disregard to a person like Kanva. In the absence of Kanva from the hermitage, he should at least have informed Gautami, the chief matron of the hermitage, about his love for arid marriage with Shakuntala. It is noteworthy that he does not even think of that. Rather, in his infatuation he forgets everyone except Shakuntala. Thus Dushyanta's behaviour also is not completely flawless. Hence the

curse of Durvasa had its effects also on him.

Thus the roots of the curse are to be found in the un-fortunate errors of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Yet these mistakes are not conscious errors, and so the curse, though dreadful, is not a permanent one. The curse ends in the reunion of the two lovers, blessed by the divine sages. It is therefore a blessing in disguise.

The curse plays a very significant part in the play, and yet it appears only in the 'Prelude' to Act IV. The sage Durvasa does not even appear on the stage, and yet his dreadful pronouncement of the curse from a distance deafens ears of the reader. The curse captures the mind of the reader so strongly that he feels the grip through-out the fourth and fifth acts. The whole episode helps the reader to understand how deeply Shakuntala was engrossed in the thoughts about Dushyanta. Priyamvada and Anasuya, who are a little farther away from the hermitage, can hear every word of the curse, and yet the love-lorn Shakuntala cannot hear it.

In addition to dramatic economy, Kalidasa has also achieved a notable psychological effect in depicting this curse episode. The curse has-also helped to ennoble Dushyanta's character. Even though he repudiates his pregnant wife, he does not lose our sympathy because we know that he is under the spell of the curse.

The silence carefully maintained by Priyamvada and Anasuya about the curse, again reveals Kalidasa's dramatic insight. Had Kanva known the curse, he would not have expressed his feelings of the parting with such tenderness. In fact, the pathetic atmosphere of the fourth act would have appeared gloomy if the hermits had known the curse. The conflict between two truths in the fifth act would have lost half its charm if the curse were known to Shakuntala or to the hermits. Shakuntala learns about the curse only after the reunion. Till then she suffers in silence, and therefore in Act VII she appears as an exalted, ideal Aryan wife, ever full of love and forgiveness. In the end the Sage Marica informs both the lovers about the curse. Shakuntala pardons her husband, when the curse is known to them and thus a perfect reunion is effected.

The curse is pronounced immediately after the departure of Dushyanta. The King has left, and on the same day Priyamvada and Anasuya are gathering flowers for the worship of the saubhagya-devata of Shakuntala. On the same day the curse is pronounced and the King loses his memory of Shakuntala and of his own ring. The other members of the palace (particularly vidushaka and the other queens) also forget the ring. Had this not been so, they would naturally have inquired about its whereabouts. It must be supposed that the ring escapes the memory of all through the curse of Durvasas.

17.2.5.2 Ring Motif

The ring motif has been utilised by Kalidasa in a very effective manner. From the very beginning, the ring appears to be unfaithful and ill-omened to the person possessing it. When, in the first act, Dushyanta holds it out, it reveals the truth about him when he wants to hide it.

The King wants to give it, but it does not reach Shakuntala's fingers (in Act I, due to Priyamvada's), when the King so desired it. Priyamvada and Anasuya place confidence in the ring, and it betrays their confidence. It slips away from the fingers of Shakuntala without her knowledge. In the Royal Court, when it is badly needed, it is not available; and thus it puts Shakuntala in an altogether false position. In the sixth act, it comes back to Dushyanta's hands, only to make him extremely sad. The ring has been so unfaithful to Shakuntala that she lost all confidence in it, and therefore, at the time of the re-union she refuses to accept it when it is offered to her by Dushyanta.

Dushyanta offers his ring to Shakuntala in order to make her free from the debt she owes to Priyamvada. This pretext is not entirely free from objections. Priyamvada and Anasuya are hermit girls; they do not use ornaments. Unlike worldly ladies, they have no attachment for gold. Dushyanta was a King and should have known this. His enthusiasm in offering the ring seems to reveal his ignorance about the life of hermits. The purpose of the ring here is to disclose the identity of the King, but one feels that that could have as well been served in some other way than the King's offering it.

We have already seen that the curse of Durvasas has had a mysterious effect on the ring, as it has escaped the memory not only of the King, but also of every other person at the royal palace. Even when Shakuntala refers to the ring in Act V, neither the King, nor the discerning Purohita remembers the missing ring. The curse of Durvasas seems to have worked on his mind also. It appears that Kalidasa wanted to suggest that true love needs no tokens.

17.2.6 Nature in the play

Kalidasa has always expressed himself against the back-ground of nature. Each of his works breathes of nature; and it appears that nature has entered into his bones as it were. Every act of the play, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* except the fifth act, has its setting amidst nature. In the first act we find a black-spotted deer, with its neck turned and hinder part of the body contracted, galloping fast for the fear of the arrow of the pursuing King. In the precincts of the hermitage we find wild rice fallen under the trees that abound in the nests of birds, deer moving fearlessly and the tender sprouts with a changed colour owing to the smoke arising from sacrificial fires. The ground is made clear of the sharp blades of Darbha grass, and we have, in the hermitage, creepers like Navamalika, trees like Kesara and the hovering Bhramara. Near the hermitage we have a seat covered with the dense shade of the Saptaparna trees. A thickly inter-woven creeper-bower, in the forest and outside the camp of Dushyanta, forms the background of the second act. In the third act, Shakuntala is to be found on the bank of the river Malini, in a creeper-bower enclosed by canes, and where the cool breezes blow, with the fragrance of lotuses and cool particles of the river. The fourth act, in brief, reveals the world of nature. The scene of the fifth act is the royal palace of Dushyanta at Hastinapura. Here we are not in Nature and yet we are not completely away from her. Sharnga-rava, Sharadavata and Gautami dressed in bark garments; the reference to the story of the young

deer Dirghapanga and the words like ‘*parabhrita*’ revive our memory of nature. The sixth act begins with a scene in Pramadavana, blooming with spring. The King and Vidushaka talk in the bower of Madhavi creepers. In the seventh act we have King Dushyanta coming down from the Heaven to the Earth through the region of Pravaha Vayu and the region of clouds. Later on, we have the hermitage of the Sage Maricha, which abounds with trees like Mandara, Kalpa-vrksa and Ashoka and lakes with golden lotuses.

In the play Shakuntala is like a daughter of Nature. She treats Nature as her mother and so she has affection for every tree, for every creeper and for every sprout. She will not drink water without herself watering the trees. She has “*saudara sneha*” for trees. She can forget herself but not the Navamalika creeper. She will not pluck even a tender sprout in spite of her fondness for ornaments. The flowering season of Nature is a great festival for her. To her, deer are her own children. She will apply ingudi-oil to the mouth of a young deer, which is wounded slightly in course of eating the Darbha grass. She, in her own hands, will hold out the wild rice for the deer to eat. Before leaving the hermitage, she embraces the Vanajyotsna creeper and leaves it under the care of her friends. She is anxious about the pregnant deer. She writes a love letter on a lotus leaf. She covers her breasts with the lotus-leaves, sleeps on a bed of flowers and wears a bracelet of lotus-stalk.

Even Nature has the same deep affection for Shakuntala. The foliage of Kesara tree invites Shakuntala. The young deer will not allow Shakuntala to leave the hermitage and therefore, pulls her garment. At the departure of Shakuntala, the peacocks give up their dance; the deer throws away the half-eaten morsels of Darbha grass and trees shed tears in the form of leaves. The deer Dirghapanga drinks water only from Shakuntala’s hands. The trees serve Shakuntala by providing her with a pair of silk garments, the red paint and other ornaments. Certainly, the mother has to decorate her daughter. The affection between Nature and Shakuntala is so deep that Kanva first requests nature to allow Shakuntala to go to her husband’s place (Act IV).

Thus, we find nature, not as working against the human life, but as working in perfect harmony with it. This blending of nature and human feeling is complete, and it is impossible to think of one without the other.

17.3 Let Us Sum up

Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanashkuntalam* is a love drama and belongs to the class of *rupaka* which is known as *nataka*. The single play has displayed the poet’s genius. It abounds striking and tasteful comparisons. The action is progressive and the interest well sustained. The story, the situation, and the characters are all highly imaginative, and nothing can surpass the beauty and justice of many of the thoughts.

17.4 Review Questions

1. The original prosaic story taken from the *Mahabharata* lacks dramatic elements. It

has been dramatized by Kalidasa with that dramatic skill and mastery over his art. Justify this statement.

2. Write a note on Kalidasa's Imagination and fancy that work in the play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.
3. How does the present play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam* satisfies the general conditions given by ancient acharyas in relation to the *arthaprakritis* which consists of plot, stages and juncture?
4. Sketch the character of Shakuntala.
5. Discuss Dushyanta as a *dhirodatta* hero.
6. Jusify the curse of Durvasa in relation to the characters of Dushyanta and Shakuntala.
7. Write a critical appreciation of any act of the play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.
8. Write a note on the importance of nature in the play, the *Abhijnanashakuntalam*.

17.5 Bibliography

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UNIT-18

SUDRAKA : *MRICHCHHA KATIKAM*

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
 - 18.1.1 Vastu or The Plot
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18.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Sudrak's play, *Mrichchhakatikam*

- life of the playwright
- sources of the play
- detailed story of the play

- Plot of the play
- thematic analysis of the play
- Art of Characterization

18.1 Introduction

Poetry in Sanskrit, from its inherent nature as a part from its intrinsic merit is divided into two kinds- ‘what is capable of being seen or exhibited’ and ‘what can be heard or chanted.’ ‘*Rupaka*’ is the general term in Sanskrit for all dramatic composition, which also comprises a subordinate class called *Uparupaka*.

The *Rupaka* which has *Rasa* or Sentiment for its substratum is divided into ten classes. Of the *Uparupakas* or minor Dramas there are eighteen species.

The principal division among the *Rupakas* themselves are, *Vastu* or Plot of the play, *Neta* or the Hero and *Rasa* or the Sentiment.

18.1.1 Vastu or The Plot

Vastu is primarily of two kinds: Principal and Accessary. The Principal is that which relates to the chief characters or the person concerned with the essential interest of the piece and pervades the whole arrangement. The Accessary is that which appears in the furtherance of the main topic, and is concerned characters other than the Hero or the Heroine. There are two other elements which are necessary for development of the plot. These are *Bija* or the seed, *Bindu* or the drop, and *Karya* or the final issue. *Bija* is the circumstance leading to the ultimate end briefly stated, which, as the plot develops, bears many results, and which is as it were the seed of the plot. *Bindu* is what cements a break in the plot caused by the introduction of some other incident. *Karya* is the final object of the plot.

The *Vastu*, which is thus divided into five classes, may again be divided into three classes according to the source of its derivation. It may be borrowed from history or tradition, or it may be fictitious, or mixed. A *Nataka* belongs to the first class, a *prakarana* to the second.

As regards its development a dramatic plot has five stages or conditions called *Avasthas* which are

Beginning, effort, prospects of success, certain attainment through the removal of obstacles and obtainment of the desired object. While these five stages are in progress there are some links to connect them with the main plot. These are called *Samdhis*. They are five in number each of which they join with its corresponding stage- *mukha samdhi* is the combination of the *bija* and *arambha*, *pratimukha samdhi* is the means to the chief end, *garbha samdhi* is attainment and non-attainment of the desired end implying a further sprouting up of the original *bija*., *avamarsa samdhi* in which the seed attains a more luxuriant and growth than in *Garbha*,

being accompanied by Niyatapti of the end, but whose final result is postponed further off by fresh impediments of various sorts, as in the Sakuntala the King's forgetting Shakuntala after marriage owing to Durvasa's curse. The Nirvahana or consummation is the harmonious combination of all the aforesaid parts in the final catastrophe.

The subject matter, whether historical, fictitious or mixed, is from its inherent nature, capable of two-fold division. It is divided into (1) deserving to be suggested or implied only as being of a dry or otherwise unfit character; and (2) fit to be represented and heard as being highly pleasing.

18.1.2 Neta or The Hero

The hero is required to be modest, decorous, comely, munificent, civil, of sweet nature, eloquent, sprung from a noble family. Heroes are mentioned to be of four kinds; *Dhirodatta* or Hero of sublime qualities, is one who is magnanimous, patient, not given to boasting, self-possessed, of firm resolve, whose high spirit is concealed and who is true to his engagements. As far as our play is concerned there is no need of other types of heroes. Each of these heroes may be of one type or other of four sorts. He may be a *gallant* i.e. equally devoted to many women though principally attached to one; or *sly*, i.e. one, who being attached to one lady, covertly acts in a way unpleasant to her; or he may be *bold* openly making his professions to another, and not ashamed when reproached; or lastly he may be *favourable* devoted to one heroine only

Among the assistants of the Hero, the principal is the hero of the Pataka or episode, clever in discourse, devoted to his master, and a little inferior to him in qualities. Next comes the *Vidushaka*, his constant companion, whose business consists in the repartees of wit, in helping his friend in love-intrigues and thus assisting in the general denouncement of the play. The third, and of equal rank with the *Vidushaka*, is *Vita*, who knows one art only and is thereby useful to the Hero. The hero thus equipped may still take into his service ministers of religion, ascetics, allies as well as eunuchs, mutes, barbarians and sometimes there may be a Rival-Hero called *Pritinayak*, who is avaricious, bold, impetuous, criminal and of evil conduct.

The Nayika or the Heroine, who must be possessed of qualities similar to those of the Hero, is of three kinds. She may be the wife of the hero, or belonging to the another, or a common woman. The maiden's love, however, better helps the *rasa* and is therefore, the most favourite theme with many Sanskrit poets.

18.1.3 Rasa or the Sentiment

Rasa is that lasting impression or feeling produced to his overwhelming delight in a man of poetic sensibility by the proper action of the *Vibhavas*, and *Anubhavas*, as well as the *Sattvikbhavas* and the *Vyabhicharibhavas*. *Bhava* or feeling is the complete pervasion of the heart by any emotion, whether of pleasure or of pain, arising from the object under sight. *Vibhava* or an Exitant is that which being perceived nourishes the main sentiment. It is divided

into the *Alambana*, that which is, as it were, the support or substratum of the *Rasa*, the person or thing with reference to which a sentiment arises- such as Hero or the Heroine and *Uddipana*, or what excites or enhances the sentiment, such as the moon, the beauties of the vernal season, beauty, decorations of the principal character in the case of *Anubhava* or an *Ensua* is the outward manifestation of internal feeling through eyes, face. The *Sattvika* or natural *bhavas* are a subdivision of *Anubhava*, and are mentioned as eight in number. The *Vyabhicharies* or the *Accessaries* are those *Bhavas* which are not strictly confined to any *Rasa*, but appearing and disappearing, like waves in the ocean, they serve as feeders to the prevailing sentiment and strengthen it in different ways. *Sthahibhavas* or the permanent Sentiment of a composition is one- the ocean melting all salt into water-which not being interrupted by any sentiment contrary to its nature occurring at intervals, converts all of them into its own nature. Now a *Rasa* would prove contrary to another if the substratum of both were the same. But as principal and subordinate a *rasa* may be mixed with one or more of others.

There are eight *Sthayibhavas*, *riti*, *haas*, *shok*, *krod*, *utsah*, *bhay*, *jugusa* and *vismaya* on which are based respectively the eight sentiments- the erotic, the pathetic, the furious, the heroic, the terrible, the loathing and the Marvelous. There is a ninth sentiment, that of the quietistic, having tranquility for its *Sthayibhava*. But it is not suited to dramatic purposes and rarely occurs as a main sentiment in the drama.

18.1.4 The General Conduct of The Nataka

Every dramatic piece opens with a prelude or prologue which is itself introduced by what is called the *Nandi*. This *Nandi*, according to some, must suggest the gist of the whole plot. The *Sutradhara* may sometimes retire after the recital of the *Nandi*, in which case another actor called *sthapak*, for he establishes as it were the topic of the play, takes his place. In the prelude, which may begin with a brief allusion to the poet's literary attainments; the *sutradhara* or *sthapaka* suggests the subject in the form of *Bija*, or by a simple beginning, or by naming the character about to enter. He must please the audience with sweet songs descriptive of some season and couched in the *Bharati vritti*. The prelude being over the piece is commenced, being hereafter arranged and exhibited in the manner indicated in the three foregoing Sections. The whole matter should be well determined and divided into Acts and scenes. A *Nataka* may consist of five to ten Acts. The Hero should be *Dhirondatta*. The prevailing sentiment should be *Vir* or *Karuna*, others being introduced as conducive to its development. Nothing should be introduced in the play which may demean the Hero or is discordant with the main sentiment. An Act must not be tiresomely long, should be full of *Rasa*, and introduced by *Vishkambhaka*, as according to necessity. Such incidents as journeys, massacres, wars should not be represented in a play; they may only be indicated. The death of the Hero must never be exhibited. This accounts for the somewhat monotonous character of Sanskrit plays and the absence of tragedies in Sanskrit. The play should end, as it began, with a prayer, called the *Bharatavakya*, as it is repeated by the principal personage in his

character of an actor, and contains an expression of wishes for general prosperity and happiness. The unity of interest or action must be maintained throughout. As regards the language to be used in the piece, The Hero and other higher characters speak in classical Sanskrit, while females and other minor characters speak in the different *Prakrit* dialects.

So the characteristic features of the Indian Drama are mainly three:- (1) its peculiar structure; (2) the absence of the distinction between Comedy and Tragedy; and the diversity of languages to be spoken by the characters. The above mentioned features of a *Nataka* belong with certain modifications to the other divisions of the *Rupaka* as well. Of these *Prakarana* and the *Trotaka* are well noticeable. The plot of *Prakarana* should be fictitious and drawn from real life in a respectable society. The Hero, who must be *Dhiraprashant*, may be of ministerial rank, or a *Brahmana*, or a merchant. The Heroine may be a maiden of a noble family, or a courtesan. The most appropriate sentiment is the Erotic. There should be ten Acts. The *Mrichahhakatika*, belongs to such species. A *Trotaka* may consist of five, seven, eight or nine Acts. The character to be represented should be celestial as well as human. The Vidushaka should take a prominent part in it and be present in every Act. In other particulars it is similar as *Nataka*.

18.3 About the Author

Not only the age but the very name of the author of *Mrichchhakatikam* is more or less shrouded in mystery. Indian tradition has attributed the drama to one Sudraka. Some curious and scrappy details about Sudraka's life are given in the *prastavana* (introduction) of the play itself. We are here told that Sudraka was a Kshatriya king, though of what country is not mentioned; he was brave and handsome in appearance. He knew the *Rigveda* and the *Samveda*, mathematics, the art of courtesans, and the science of training elephants. He was a devotee of Siva and had preformed the Ashvamedha sacrifice. He died at the ripe age of a hundred years.

As regards Sudraka's works, nothing was known to be written by him except the *Mrichchhakatikam*. However there are works which are said to be his. These are: *Padmaprabhritaka Vatsarajacharita Vasavadatta*

18.4 About the Play

It is a lamentable fact that, except a few well-established landmarks, the chronology of Sanskrit literature is still unsettled. The dates of very few writers are given by themselves or by their contemporaries; and in most of the cases they have to be evolved or inferred from a mass of literary material which may or may not be sufficient in providing exact information. Very often the result consists in summing up of different conflicting theories, and approximating towards what appears to be the feasible solution. This can be said about *Mrichchhakatikam* also, whose age and authorship was doubtful, but a recent discovery of a play of Bhasa has provided new date and brought to light the drama *Charudatta*, whose enlarged and completed

version seems to be *Mrichchhakatika*. The valuable contributions have been made to the discussion by several scholars, which have added to our knowledge regarding the source of the play and finally rested several doubts and inquiries. The inquiry has been ahead than what it was earlier but still we can not fix the date of the play with the degree of accuracy desired by the sincere inquirer; only a nearest approach is possible

18.4.1 Sources of the play

The *Mrichahhakatika*, stands at the head of all Sanskrit plays in providing us with a plot that is neither poor nor colorless; it is a love story full of adventures that stand apart by themselves outside the conventional class of super-human agency or insipid intrigues. The credit for inventing this distinctly fresh and vigorous plot has been given to Sudraka, as a writer of original creative power, when the discovery of Bhasa's *Charudatta* threw a flood of light on the construction of *Mrichahhakatika*. It was immediately noticed that the *Charudatta*, which too is based on the loves of Charudatta and Vasantsena, bore an extraordinary resemblance to the *Mrichahhakatika*; the two plays accorded with each other with such completeness of details that it was patent, even on a cursory examination, that one of them must have been an adaptation of the other. It's a strange spectacle of a whole play being simply re-written and transformed into another with a different title, except that the story of *Charudatta*, which is in four Act, is carried on in *Mrichahhakatika* till tenth Act. The identical words, expressions, sentences, stanzas, ideas and similies are to be found in both the plays, generally in an amplified and expanded form in the *Mrichahhakatika*, and in a simple and brief one in *Charudatta*. Thus most scholars have agreed that *Mrichahhakatika*, is an enlarged version of the *Charudatta*. Though the latter has been left incomplete by the author; though there are indications that he had intended to complete it. Some believe that Bhasa might have composed the whole play, but a portion of it lost afterwards, so only a fragment is available. But this is most unlikely; had the whole play been accessible to Sudraka, surely there could have been no motive for him to re-write the same play from beginning to the end. In Sudraka's days too the plays must have been known as a fragment, and hence there was an opportunity for an expert hand to revise it and complete it for presentation; and if Sudraka knew the play as fragment, the probability is that Bhasa never completed it, not that the latter part was lost in the short interval separating the two poets.

In giving a more polished and a completer form to the work of his predecessor, Sudraka has preserved the original almost intact, especially its fine passages and special witticism.

18.4.2 Act-wise Summary

The *Mrichchhakatika* is a drama in ten Acts based on the story of Charudatta, a prominent but poor inhabitant of Ujjayini, and Vasantasena, an exquisitely beautiful but pure-hearted courtesan of the same city. The summary of the play is as follows as it is developed in the course of the various Acts:

Act I.

In the prelude (*prastavana*), after the Benedictory stanza (*Nandi*), the *Sutradhara* gives some interesting particulars about the author of the play which he is about to stage. A conversation between him and his wife, Nati, which follows, is intended chiefly to lead up to the entrance of the Vidushaka (Maitreya), at which point the action of the play really begins. Maitreya is a poor *brahmana* and an honest and sincere friend of Charudatta, a wealthy citizen of Ujjayini who, however, no longer possesses his former wealth, having spent it all in noble and charitable deeds. One Churnvridha, who is Charudatta's friend, sends a cloak by Maitreya with instructions to give the same to his master. Charudatta enters, and the cloak is duly handed over to him. Their conversation for a while turns upon Charudatta's poverty; then Vasantasena comes upon the scene. She is being pursued by Sakara, the brother-in-law of king Palaka of Ujjayini, and the villain of the piece. He is a debauchee, a coward and a fool, a self-centered person; he is accompanied by two of his followers, Vita and Cheta. They entreat, cajole and threaten Vasantasena by turns, but all the same with great indignation she rejects Sakara's suit. She takes refuge in Charudatta's mansion; and in the darkness of the night her pursuers light on Radanika, a maid in Charudatta's employ, mistaking her for the object of their search. Maitreya intervenes and turns them all out. Vasantsena is later introduced to Charudatta; she had already heard of his virtues and fallen in love with him, contrary though it was to the profession of a courtesan to become attached to a penniless man. Wishing to keep up the acquaintance, she employs an ingenious device; she leaves her ornaments with Charudatta, ostensibly for safe custody, but really as an excuse for further communication with him. She then leaves, escorted by Charudatta who on returning makes over the ornaments Maitreya for safe keeping.

Act II

Vasantsena, talking in confidence with her maid Madanika, reveals the warmth of her feelings for Charudatta, and also the real reason for depositing the ornaments with him. Then follows a scene introducing a number of gamblers; one of them, Samvahaka, is running away without paying his debt, and is being pursued by his creditor and the master of the gaming house. Assisted by another gambler, Samvahaka escapes and takes shelter in the house of Vasantsena, who in kindness pays his debt for him and gets him rid of his pursuers. Samvahaka is tired of gambling, and leaves after declaring his resolve of donning the robes of a Bhikshu. One of Vasantsena's servants then enters and relates how he has just rescued a Bhikshu, presumably, Samvahaka and how his brave act was rewarded by Charudatta by the gift of his own cloak. This affords her another proof of the noble generosity of the worthy Charudatta; she takes the cloak and wears it herself, for she loves everything belonging to her beloved and worshipped hero.

Act III

There was a Brahmin in Ujjayini named Sarvilika, who having fallen in love with

Madanika, the slave maid of Vasantsena, wanted to pay her ransom and marry her. Being himself poor, he had turned a burglar to obtain necessary amount of gold. He breaks into Charudatta's house by night when all are sleeping, and steals all the ornaments of Vasantsena which Maitreya had to keep with himself. The theft is soon discovered. Charudatta is distressed by the theft, not because the money meant anything to him, but because the ornaments were kept with him as a deposit, which he was bound in honour to return on demand. His wife Dhuta, however, whose nobility is on par with her husband's gives her own necklace to help him out of the difficulty. Charudatta thereupon asks the Vidushaka to go to Vasantsena with that necklace, which he was to offer to her in exchange for her own ornaments and he was to state, were lost by his master at gambling, under the belief that they belong to himself.

Act IV

Sarvilika calls upon Madanika with a view to buy her freedom with those stolen ornaments. On being questioned as to the source of his sudden accession to wealth, he half confesses that they belong to Charudatta. Madanika, however has recognized as the property of her mistress; she recommends that Sarvilika had better return them to where he had taken them from, Sarvilika, however, could not face Charudatta as a declared thief; as an alternative, therefore, she urges him to see Vasantsena and offer them to her, professing that Charudatta had sent them back through him, as house was thought unsafe. Sarvilika does so; but Vasantsena who had heard the preceding conversation, is not taken in by the pseudo-messenger. Nevertheless in her goodness of heart she bestows Madanika on her adventurous suitor. Sarvilika has to leave suddenly in a hurry to go to the assistance of his friend Aryaka, whom king Palaka had imprisoned for the fear he might become a king, as a seer had predicted that he would. Vasantsena, is next visited by Maitreya, who, it may be remembered, is deputed by Charudatta to offer her his wife's necklace in exchange for those lost ornaments. Vasantsena is deeply touched by this fresh proof of Charudatta's nobility, and she sends words that she would be calling upon Charudatta that evening.

Act V

Vasantsena pays her promised visit, in spite of a terrible thunderstorm raging in the streets. On reaching Charudatta's house, she returns those ornaments to him under the plea that she had lost his necklace, just as he had formerly lost her ornaments, thereby intimating that she had seen through the ruse, well meant though it was. The lovers have now come together, and there is nothing that can prevent their union, with which the central theme of the play reaches its climax.

Act VI.

Vasantsena passes the night in Charudatta's house, in his company. In the evening Charudatta leaves home early, with instructions to his servant to bring Vasantsena to the Pushpakarandaka garden, in a carriage. Before that is done, we have a heart-rending scene, where Rohasena, Charudatta's son, is described as crying because he was given an earthen

toy cart (*mrichchhakatika*) to play with, instead of a golden one as desired by him. Vasantsena, gives him ornaments out of which the boy is to get a toy cart made, and thus the boy goes away happily. This is the incident which gives the play its title. Then the servant Vardhamanaka comes in and announces that the carriage is ready; Vasantsena asks him to wait, while she finishes her toilet. The servant, suddenly remembers that he has forgotten the carriage cushions, and goes back to bring them. In the meanwhile there comes in Sakara's servant, Sthavaraka, who too is driving his masters carriage in the same direction. Vasantsena gets into the carriage by mistake, without being aware of it, and is thus taken to the garden. Just at this time Aryaka, whom Palaka had imprisoned, has escaped from his cell; he happens to meet the carriage of Vardhamanaka as the latter was coming back. While the back of the driver was turned, Aryaka gets into his carriage, Vardhamanaka believing that it was Vasantsena, who had entered the carriage drives off but shortly stopped by two city's guards who insist upon inspecting the carriage. One of them, Chandanaka, looks in first; he recognizes the prisoner, but promises to help him to escape; he therefore deliberately picks a quarrel with the other guard, Viraka, whom he beats and drives off. The way now being clear, Aryaka escapes in safety, Vardhamanaka never discovering all the while whom he was really driving.

Act VII

Vardhamanaka brings the carriage to the *Pushpakarandaka*, where Charudatta is awaiting Vasantsena ; as it is Aryaka and not Vasantsena, who steps out of the carriage. True to the innate generosity of his heart, Charudatta promises him safely and advises him to proceed further in the same carriage, as that would allay suspicion; they two part the best of friends, Aryaka in gratitude and Charudatta , in the consciousness of a good deed performed. Charudatta leaves without further waiting for Vasantsena, for he did not like to be seen there after he had assisted in the escape of Aryaka, which was actually treason towards the king.

Act VIII

The Bhikshu (Samvahaka) visits Pushpakarandaka garden to wash his robe, where he is harassed by Sakara and finally driven away. Sakara is waiting for his carriage, which finally arrives; he is surprised to find Vasantsena inside, though it is welcome surprise, as it affords him the opportunity to renew his attention to her. She spurns him; where upon Sakara, in his foolishness decides to kill her, as a punishment. He asks his followers, Vita and Cheta, to do the killing, which they promptly and emphatically refuse. Sakara then decides to kill her himself; he gets rid of Cheta and Vita under one pretext and another, and strangles Vasantsena. She falls down senseless but not dead; he however believes that he has killed her. On the return of Vita and Cheta on the scene, Sakara boasts of his master and his ways, and leaves him to join the newly formed party of Aryaka. Sakara orders Cheta to go to the palace, where he intends to hold him a prisoner, lest he might give out the secret concerning the real author of the crime. Finally, he hits upon the idea of proclaiming Charudatta as the murderer of Vasantsena; this would be complete revenge; for Charudatta was his rival in her affections, and it was for his sake that she spurned him, as he believed. On the departure of Sakara, the

Bhikshu comes back to the spot to dry his robes, and discovers Vasantsena. He restores her by rendering her first-aid, and takes her to a convent nearby.

Act IX

The scene is now shifted to the court of justice, where in the presence of a presiding judge and two assessors, Sakara finally charges Charudatta with having enticed Vasantsena, to his garden and there murdered her for the sake of ornaments. The judge opens the case by calling Vasantsena 's mother, who gives evidence about the existence of a love affair between her daughter and a citizen named Charudatta; she also states that so far as she knew Vasantsena, was then supposed to be in Charudatta's house. Next Charudatta is himself sent for, who denies any exact knowledge of Vasantsena's whereabouts. In the meantime Viraka arrives to lay information against his fellow-guard Chandanaka who had mauled and assaulted him while he was trying to inspect a carriage which belonged to Charudatta and in which Vasantsena was supposed to be traveling in the direction of *Pushpakarandaka* garden. The judge sends him to find out if a woman's dead body was lying in the garden. As ill luck would have it, a dead body of a woman was lying there, who had been accidentally killed by the fall of a tree. Viraka comes back and tells what he has seen. This is sufficient evidence to charge Charudatta with Vasantsena's murder; he however does not make any serious effort to defend himself as he he was so much weighed down by the thought that Vasantsena was no more. Now life seemed of no interest to him, and further that he being penniless, would not be believed in what he would say and the judges would not give him fair hearing. As a matter of fact, the judge is quite favourable, but he has to investigate the truth; the guilt of Charudatta, is already by his half silence; and further damning evidence is unwittingly given by Maitreya who brings with him Vasantsena's ornaments, the same which she gave to Rohasena; the ornaments are pointed out by Sakara as the motive for the murder, and they belonged to Vasantsena and came out from Charudatta 's house. The Chain of evidence is almost complete. Charudatta does not give any satisfactory explanation and the judge has to declare him guilty. King Palaka, thereupon, pronounces the death sentence upon the murderer, as Charudatta is now adjudged to be. He is to be taken to the cemetery and there impaled as a warning to all the similar wrong-doers.

Act X

Charudatta is being taken to the cemetery by the two Chandalas, who are to act as his executioners, though they do not much relish their job. Charudatta 's guilt is proclaimed at each proclamation-station on the way. Maitreya brings in Rohasena so that his father might look at his son's face ; Maitreya entreats the Chandalas to release Charudatta ; which of course they cannot. Then Sakara's servant Cheta, whom his master has put in irons, hears the proclamation; anxious to declare the truth, he resolutely jumps from the room wherein he was confined. He denounces Sakara as the guilty party, but latter arrives there at this juncture and somehow manages to prove, to the satisfaction of the simple minded Chandalas, that Cheta was a thief and a liar and that his statement is not to be relied upon. Then they reach the point of execution, where Charudatta is now about to be impaled. But the Bhikshu accompanied by

Vasantsena arrives there in the nick of time; the charge of murder falls through and the innocence of Charudatta is at once fully established and also Sakara's guilt. Sarvilaka then enters and announces that Aryaka had killed the wicked king Palaka and installed himself on his throne as his successor. For the valuable aid rendered by him in times of need, Charudatta, is rewarded by Aryaka with the kingdom of Kusavati. The title of 'wife' is conferred upon Vasantsena, to whom the stigma of being called a courtesan would no longer attach. Similar suitable honours are also conferred upon Samvaraka, the Chandalas, Chandanaka, and even the villainous Sakara, for Charudatta was not the person to revenge himself on the fallen enemy. After this happy conclusion, the play terminates with the usual stanza (Bharatavakya) containing an expression of goodwill towards all and unhappiness for none.

18.4.3 Themes of the play

Sudraka deals with primarily two themes in the *Mrichahhakatika*, which are skillfully weaved in the plot itself. The principal theme is the love of Charudatta, a poor dignified Brahmin of Ujjayini and Vasantsena, a beautiful but a pure hearted courtesan of the same city. The hero is a person in accordance to the rules laid by the masters of Sanskrit Drama. He is a knowledgeable, dignified and calm, in adverse circumstances and engaged in the pursuit of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* in due proportion. The heroine though a courtesan but of her love and sacrifice sets an example and can be easily placed in the category of kulastri.

The second theme is the dethronement of king Palaka of Ujjayini and Aryaka's accession to the throne. The predominant *rasa* is *singara*, assisted by the occasional introduction of *karuna*, *haysa* and *vibhatysa*.

18.4.4 Plot of the play

The *Mrichahhakatika*, of Sudraka, a known dramatic composition of Hindus occupies a high place. It is a creation of outstanding order. By virtue of its high dramatic charm and its great literary excellence it has endeared itself to generations of spectators and readers; the play has been adapted in many Indian vernaculars, and in that modern form continues to draw admiration of several audiences as it was when the play was performed thousands years back for the first time, probably in Ujjayini. The *Mrichahhakatika*, possesses several unique features which have enabled it to achieve such unqualified success and assure to itself an ever-widening circle of readers. Prominent of all its features is its cleverly conceived and successfully constructed plot; it is the picture of contemporary society, not a dull narration of the doing of divine or semi divine personages; and its interest is heightened by a variety of moving episodes that arouse alternating emotions of joy, curiosity, wonder, pity and even fear, among the spectators. No other Sanskrit play exhibits such a array of enlivening incidents or thrilling dramatic situations as we go to make up the ingeniously wrought story of *Mrichahhakatika*. In the first Act Vasantsena being pursued in the dark of the night by some hooligans takes shelter in Vasantsena's house. In the second Act, there is a similar scene where a gambler Samavahaka is vspursued

by his creditors; there is a hand to hand flight on the stage, an incident which appeal to a section of audience; the play-wright who aims at being successful, keeps all sections of society in his mind. Moreover the flight is not forced one but a natural one arising out of the fight between a lower characters, especially a quarrel over monetary matters. In the third Act we have a burglary scene, where Sarvilaka is seen stepping in stealthily in the stillness of the night and proceeding scientifically to demonstrate the art of house breaking. The fifth Act is staged amidst thunder, rain and lightening. The sixth scene contains the exciting episodes of the interchange of the carriages and the flight and pursuit of Aryaka; in the eighth scene there is strangling of Vasantsena , which only a skillful and realistic writer like Sudraka would have dared to introduce, and which for a moment strikes the audience dumb with the appalling brutality of the crime. The ninth Act describes Charudatta 's trial, and the tenth his being taken for execution, which , however is averted at the last moment by the opportune arrival of Vasantsena. The interest of the spectators is thus caught and maintained throughout the play, with great dexterity. The humor and variety of the events of the earlier Acts and the pathos of the later Acts, which form a virtual tragedy, makes the play throb with life and action.

18.4.5 Characterization

The characterization in the *Mrichahhakatika*, is another element which adds to its popularity.

Its characterization is most powerful and varied than any other Sanskrit drama and time and again it has been appreciated by Indian as well as western scholars. Shudraka has painted a large number of character, almost a cosmopolitan crowd; it comprises a learned Brahmana, a rich courtesan, robbers, gamblers, and headsmen, portly judges and royal rakes; with a few deft touches he brings out the salient characteristics of each, but his greatest triumph lies undoubtedly in the creation of the villain, the king's brother-in-law. His original name was Samsthanaka, but the poet endowed him with a drawl and a lisp and the expressive sobriquet of Sakara, which is the title under which he is familiar to the multitude of play-goers. He is represented as a empty headed fool; but the emptiness seems more put on than real, for where necessary he shows the devil's own depth of cunning and knows much better than a common fool how to look after number one. Charudatta is another character, set in quite a different mould, the beau-ideal of a gentleman, with a high sense of honour and famous for his charitable deeds, to whom by common consent was applied a title of *Arya*, the 'noble one.' Then there is Vasantsena , a courtesan by profession but almost a *kulstri* in her principles, who, once her heart is attached to Charudatta , loves him the more for his poverty and disdains to look at any other suitor, not even the royal connections. In Maitreya Sudraka has created a somewhat a different type of Vidushaka, distinct from the common glutton and fool who plays antics on the stage; he is a honest, simple-minded, and straightforward, his blunders are the result of simplicity, and do not originate in a spirit of buffoonery; he is a faithful retainer of his patron Charudatta to whom he clings through thick and thin, ready to follow him even in death. Even the servants Sthavaraka and Vardhamanaka, and Radanika and Madanika, have distinct characteristics of

their own, which makes them live before us; in fact one almost fancies that the author has devoted much care to portraying the slave Sthavaraka as to delineating his master Sakara; he would obey his employer upto a certain point, beyond which he ceases to be a pliant tool and becomes a human being with a moral sense of right and wrong, which he does not hesitate to assert, being willing even to lose his life in an attempt to save the innocent Charudatta from being unjustly killed. The gamblers, the Chandalas, the assessors in fact all the different characters, have been shown in their proper relief. Other authors appear to take much care of their prime character and neglect the rest; Sudraka gives the same meticulous attention to each. He has been compared in this respect to Shakespeare and Moliere.

Characters

The principal characters of the *Mrichahhakatika* are drawn from the upper middle class, while its subsidiary episodes introduce such low people as gamblers, hangmen etc. Though this was inevitable in a play whose plot was drawn from the real life, and it is natural that we see therein an exact reflection of the condition and manners of contemporary society, including its government and its laws in particular.

Charudatta

The poet has chosen for his hero Charudatta, a Brahmin youth of Ujjayini, whose ancestors had amassed a large fortune in trade, which subsequently disappeared and left him penniless. This poverty, however was brought on him by the extreme generosity of his nature—even his name is significant, meaning ‘he who gives nobly’; the play shows that he has spent large sums in deeds of private charity (p.88) and public utility (p.340). Generosity was his very nature, when he had nothing to give he parted away with his cloak which he was wearing. His high sense of honour makes him replace the stolen ornaments by a costly necklace and do such deeds of nobleness that won the heart of a courtesan who happened to be rich and beautiful. He is seen in the very first act as lamenting over his poverty, which is by some critics regarded as unworthy of a great man whom mere want of money has made so despondent; it may be urged in his justification, however, that Charudatta mourns his condition not because he wants money for pleasure but because he is thereby deprived of the opportunities of doing good to others (p.208). His silence in the law-court, when charged with murder, can not be so easily explained; for it is expected that he should defend himself suitably, not merely to save his life, but also to clear his reputation. On this occasion only the poet is able to bring a important aspect; Charudatta is shown to be an ideal person whom everyone knows and love, the judge as well as the hangmen (p.358). He is considered to be the ornament of the city; he is so large hearted that he could even admire a burglar for his skill, and so kind that he helps even Aryaka to escape in safety. His magnanimity would not allow him to revenge himself on a fallen enemy; he had highest regard for truth, and he valued honour above his life itself. In short, he is an embodiment of all the virtues, as expressively summarized by the Vita in one of the stanza.

The king is not actually introduced in the play. It seems that he ruled as an absolute

monarch, and if he happened to be a tyrant (as Palaka was) discontent would be rife among the subjects, being a direct incentive to armed rebellion as soon as opportunity would offer. The king was assisted by counselors and was also the head of the army; there were the usual departments of state such as revenue, justice, police etc. The ninth Act gives us special insight into the judicial administration. The judge was assisted by two assessors, and justice appears to have been both impartial and speedy; the presiding judge had to follow well-formulated rules of evidence and procedure in recording facts and examining witnesses; but he could give his decision only in a form of a recommendation, the passing of the final order lying with the sovereign. If the facts were not clearly established by the evidence, recourse was to be had to four kinds of ordeals, a trial by ordeal being fairly common in ancient society for serious offences. The person under trial had to confess his crime when proved by facts. A criminal punished capitally could be set free if an adequate ransom was paid or some great event happened. The executioners had some discretionary powers; they could release a prisoner if found innocent and even punish the real offender. A creditor had absolute power over the person of his debtor; he could inflict bodily punishment on him with impunity, or even sell him for the recovery of his money. The officers of the king seem to have been jealous in the performances of their duties; Viraka and Chandanaka pursue the escaped prisoner with as much vigour and promptitude as though it was an affair in which they were personally concerned; and although in the end Chandanaka proves a traitor to his employer, it was not due to bribery or cowardice, but to an appeal to his innate sense of compassion for one wrongly oppressed.

Vasantsena

Vasantsena, the heroine of the play is a professional courtesan born and bred as such; but she is as pure minded as any lady of noble station. She falls in love with Charudatta the very first time she sees him at the festival in Cupid's shrine (p.68), and from that time onward she cannot tolerate the very idea of entertaining any other suitor; it is needless to say that she spurns Sakara. She is generous as she readily pays off the debts of Samvahaka (p.92) and releasing Madanika from her bondage with equal alacrity. Her passion for Charudatta grows so intense in the end that she goes to visit him as an *abhisarika* (p.190), in spite of a raging thunderstorm; when in his house she gives a further proof of her generous nature by giving her own ornaments to Charudatta's son for making a golden toy-cart. When finally, in Act VIII., Sakara persecutes her with his attentions, she is even ready to accept death at his hands rather than to deceive whom she has enshrined in her heart; and finally she dies with Charudatta's name on her lips. She thus is a supreme example of loyalty towards her love, for which she receives recognition at hands of King Aryaka, who bestows upon her the title of 'vadhu' (p. 402). The development of Vasantsena passion has been delineated by the poet with touches of such tenderness as raise her character to a very high degree in our eyes; for example we see when Rohasena, the innocent child, son of Charudatta declines to consider her as his mother because she was wearing ornaments. In fact, the more one sees of Vasantsena the more one thinks of her as a 'kula istri' and less as a courtesan, so far she is away from the behavior she is expected to show.

Vidushaka

In Sakara the poet has created a unique character in Sanskrit dramatic literature; a rare combination of a fool and a villain. The vidusaka as a conventional fool is in the background. His very mannerisms of speech are to cause laughter; prominent among them are his substitution of 'Sh' for 'S' his habit of using redundant words (IX.I), his absurd mythology (I. 25), his inversion order of words, and his quaint similes (VIII. 19). He happens to be king's brother-in-law, and thus is surrounded by servants and parasites. But apart from his mannerisms there is nothing entertaining about the Sakara's behavior; he is a pervert debauchee and a cruel and remorseless villain, and as may be expected, a coward. He immediately withdraws from the scene in Act I, when he finds his friend has left; and later, when the same friend shows fight, he is so afraid that he falls on the ground (p. 282); he is of course boastful enough to declare himself brave against the weaker sex (p.34). It is true that he is not sensible otherwise he would not have pursued Vasantsena when she did not love him, nor would he have so foolishly attempted to murder her in this way. Within his limits of understanding, he possesses a deep cunning and in no way a common fool; the manner in which he tries to shift the guilt on Charudatta and the way he saves himself at the same time. Moreover, the trick that he plays on Vita in Act VIII (p. 284) lulling him into a false sense that all was well, and the device that he employs to secure the silence of the Cheta by putting him in chains, the quickness with which he seizes the opportunity to point out the ornaments as a link in the chain of evidence (p. 342), and, in particular, the cleverness with which, by the hoodwinks the Chandalas, proves that he had more sense than he is generally credited with.

The Vidushaka in this play differs from the Vidushakas one meets within the works of later poets; in this play he is shown as a glutton and a buffoon; not that he is not so, but these frailties are in so less in amount that they seem to be insignificant before his other noble qualities. In the present play he appears in the role of the hero's faithful friend and retainer, ready to defend him always. The joys and sorrows of his friend seem to matter him a lot. He is simple, straightforward and lovable companion, and it is his blunders rather than his faults that make audiences laugh. He does not think very highly of the reckless liberty of his friend, nor does he approve of his attachment to Vasantsena (p.182); he protests against both, feeling it his duty to do so, but never carry his protests to an offensive state. His behavior in the last Act, including his offer of self-immolation in (p.400) to Dhuta, is a further proof of his loyalty towards his friend.

The study of the play shows that Sudraka has skillfully invested each of his minor characters with some special trait that distinguishes him or her from others. Thus, Dhuta is shown to be a devoted wife, who gives her most valuable ornament to her in hour of need (p.128); in fact she is shown to be a traditional woman devoted to her husband, and for him she is ready to sacrifice all her comforts; this is the reason why she does not even complain when she is as Vasantsena, a courtesan as her rival, and later even greets her as her equal. Rohasena is a boy, a child in his simple innocence, who cries for a toy-cart. Even being a child

he is a mature person, ready to offer his own life to save his father. Vita, is a outspoken companion of Sakara, frank and straightforward, ready to give thrashing to his friend (p.282) if too much annoyed. The judge as an officer is fair-minded, loyal and honest, as are the captains of the city's guard, Viraka and Chandanaka. The slave Sthavaraka is a God-fearing soul, who would serve his master willingly, but within limits; while the Chandalas exhibit the sense and judiciousness of persons in far superiors walks of life.

18.4.6 Social conditions

The caste system seems to have been fully recognized in those days. The Brahmins were held in great reverence and enjoyed certain privileges, immunity from capital punishment being among these; it can well be noticed that Sarvilaka declines to rob Brahmin of his gold. Brahmins often took to commerce since the ancestors of Charudatta , who was a Brahmin, who got rich through trade. Among other castes, the Kayasthas seem to have been held low in popular estimation. The vituperations hurled against each other's caste by Viraka and Chandanaka shows how strong a hold the system had on people; in spite of rigidity, however, the view that caste is no criterion of a man's worth was of great acceptance, since even the Chandalas discourse on it. Buddhism, though on decline, was yet in flourishing state, being patronized by kings and princes, and the Bhikshus seem to have been generally respected, though a certain prejudice prevailed against them among the upper classes, who considered their sight inauspicious. Commerce was carried on extensive scale, Indian ships sailing to the farthest ends of the earth; this must have contributed largely to the prosperity of the land. The wealth of the trading classes appears to have been almost fabulous, if we are to judge by the donations and public charities of Charudatta ; a large portion of this wealth passed into the hands of Kubera in splendour. Such wealth meant luxury on the grand scale, and its necessary consequences, such as the vices of drinking, gambling and prostitution; if merchants could give golden toy-cart to their sons, courtesans could go a step further and keep Scent elephants. That a courtesan should be made the heroine of a play may appear strange to a modern reader. It appears so that how low the profession of a courtesan was, so that Charudatta is ashamed to confess his connections with one.

Slavery was common, and a slave could be brought, sold, and ransomed by the payment of money. Gambling was a legalized vice; there was an association which formulated the rules of the play, and keepers of gaming saloons saw to it that these were strictly imposed. The social, religious and superstitious observances seem to have been not materially different from those that obtain in modern Hindu society; there are references to Sacrifices, fasts and celebrations and the science of astrology was universally believed in. The play contains references to music parties and drawing and painting, showing therefore, that the fine art seem to have been cultivated on a large scale, as would be expected in a wealthy society. The general economic condition of the people appears to have been prosperous on the whole, free from petty worries and minor troubles.

18.4.7 Title Of The Play

It may be noticed that dramas like those of Bhasa, Sudraka and Kalidas, being the earlier productions, composed at a period when the hard and fast rules of Sanskrit Dramaturgy were yet to be evolved, will not be found to conform precisely to all numerous minutiae as elaborated in rhetorical treatises. As, for example, Sudraka does not appear to have followed the rule which says that the name of the play should be named after the Hero and the Heroine; his play has been named after a certain incident in Act VI; where Charudatta's son Rohasena is crying because he was given a clay cart (*Mrichahhakatikam*) to play with when wanted one of gold, and where Vasantsena gives him her ornaments out of which he is asked to get such one made for himself. Since those very ornaments have afterwards served as the final and damning proof of Charudatta's supposed crime, it may be perceived that the poet's choice of the word *Mrichahhakatika*, for the title of the play is not only appropriate but also serves to satisfy the curiosity of the audience as regards the subject-matter of the play.

18.5 Let Us Sum Up

The play has been constructed with no inconsiderable skill, the author having successfully welded together a variety of exciting incidents so as to maintain the spectators' interest right up to the end. The *Mrichchhakatikam*, stands at the head of all Sanskrit plays in providing us with a plot that is neither poor nor colourless; it is a love-story full of adventures that stands apart by themselves outside the conventional class of super-human agency or insipid intrigues. The credit for inventing this distinctly fresh and vigorous plot had long been given to Sudraka, as a writer of original creative power, when the discovery of Bhasa's *Charudatta*, threw a light on the construction of our play. It was immediately seen that *Charudatta* too was based on the love of Charudatta and Vasantsena; they bore an extraordinary resemblance to the *Mrichchhakatika*. The two plays accorded with each other with such completeness of detail that it was clear, even on cursory look that one was adaptation of other.

18.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss *Mrichchhakatikam* as a Poetic Drama.
2. What is the main source of the play *Mrichchhakatikam*, and what changes or newness Sudraka has come up with ?
3. Discuss *Mrichchhakatikam* as a great Sanskrit Drama.
4. Discuss the title of the play, *Mrichchhakatikam*.
5. Discuss Sudraka as a dramatist.
6. Give a Character sketch of any of the following:

18.7 Bibliography

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 2. Kale, M.R. The Mrichchhakatika of Sudraka. Bombay, Booksellers Publishing Company. 1962.
 3. Sushma. Mrichahhakatika, A Critical Study. Gaziabad: Indo-Vision Pvt Ltd, 1985.
 4. Tripathi, Ramashankar. Mrichchhakatikam. Varanasi, Motilal Banarasidas, 1986.
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UNIT-19

PREMCHAND : *GODAN*

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction to the Author
- 19.2 Introduction to '*Godan*'
 - 19.2.1 Explanation
 - 19.2.2 Premchand's Feminism & Other Social Strands
 - 19.2.3 On Roadarmel's Translation of '*Godan*'
 - 19.2.4 Socio-Political Face of '*Godan*'
 - 19.2.5 A Critique of '*Godan*'
- 19.3 Annotations
- 19.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.5 Review Question
- 19.6 Bibliography

19.0 Objectives

The objective of this study unit is to highlight Munshi Prem Chand as one of the most competent novelists and story writers. His novel and short stories are popularly read and appreciated even today as they have not lost relevance. They are the documents of Indian ethos of the early decades of the twentieth century- the period immediately before the Independence of India from British Colonialism. *Godan* his last novel has been most feelingly written and its epic dimension presents the total perspective of the 1930s. It is a multi-faceted novel and is a classic of Hindi literature. It is high time it was subjected to inter-disciplinary study, analysis and appreciation. Though Prem Chand didn't have the British reader in mind nor did he address his problems yet the novel has been studied with equal fetish all over the world. The objective of this study is to project what makes it click. It is the authentic representation of human nature under of socio-political forces which are more or less hostile to the underdog. The novel portrays the ground reality with spontaneity and genuine perception. *Godan* has food for thought not only for creative writers and critics but also for psychologists, sociologists, economists, politicians and philosophers. It is a gold mine of ideas which come home to us effortlessly without any palpable didactic design on the part of the novelist.

19.1 Introduction to the Author

Munshi Prem Chand (1880-1936) was a bilingual short story writer and novelist who wrote both in Hindi and in Urdu with equal mastery. His writings are a mirror to social and political struggles in India in the early twentieth century. He was politically very articulate in his fiction, particularly *Godan*. His real name was Dhanpat Rai Srivastava but he was known as Munshi Prem Chand. He was born in a small village- Lanchi- a few miles away from Banaras. His immediate forbears were village accountants (*Munims*). He was a teacher in a school and later on became sub-deputy inspector (SDI) in school education department. He had travelled widely in Uttar Pradesh state. Munshi Prem Chand began his early literary career as an Urdu writer and later switched on to Hindi. At this time the social activity and followers of the Arya Samaj advocated Sanskrit-oriented Hindi, borrowing heavily from Sanskrit vocabulary. Within a few years, Hindi publications outnumbered those written in Urdu. Urdu was a hybrid language which had come into existence due to the impact of Persian language and literature during the Muslim rule in India. It had evolved as a convenient mode of social interaction and common parlance between the Muslim community and the Hindu community. The general trend of popular short stories was to romanticise love affairs but the course of love not being smooth created estrangement between the lovers and somehow they did come together. In the short stories and novels of the period there was an unfailing fervour of patriotism also. Prem Chand's first collection of short stories was published under the title *Soz-e-Vatan*. It caught the attention of the administrative authorities particularly because they read into it the idea of sedition. The British Collector of Hamirpur District disapproved of the book and ordered that all copies of it be burnt and Prem Chand was instructed not to publish any writing in future without prior permission of the government. The District Officer told him angrily "Thank your stars that you are under British rule. Had the Mughals been in power, both your hands would have been cut off. Your stories are biased you have defamed the British rule" Fortunately a few copies remained intact, though he was to surrender all unsold copies of *Soz-e-Vatan*.¹ Nawab Rai changed his name: he became Prem Chand in order to evade unjustified censorship. In 1920, Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi came to India from South Africa where he had agitated against the Whites' Government's policies hostile to the Indians. Gopal Krishna Gokhale had persuaded M.K. Gandhi to lead the Indian masses on the main land of India. Bal Gangadhar Tilak's epoch of freedom struggle led to Gandhi's political leadership. *Tilak-yuga* progressively led to *Gandhi-Yuga* in Indian freedom struggle. Prem Chand came under the influence of Gandhi and resigned his school master's job in the wake of his call to give up government job and his writing from 1920 to 1932 are saturated with Gandhian ideas. He also edited *Maryada* in Benaras and later *Madhuri* in Lucknow with realistic settings and events, Prem Chand skilfully contrived idealistic endings for his stories. Some of his characters who have been pro-British in attitude undergo moral transformation and become pro-Indian. Some villainous landlords turn into Gandhian-minded philanthropes and social activists. Frequent conversions of this nature are repeated in many stories but they are genuinely human. They are agitated or enthused or inspired or depressed as the circumstances allow them.

Godan his last novel happens to be Prem Chand's masterpiece. His short story *Kafan* (meaning 'the shroud') is equally famous. Both of them deal with rural background but the art of characterization out-distances all other thematic considerations. His novel *Seva Sadan*, *Godan*, *Premashram*, *Nirmala* etc were popularly read like his stories *Namak ka Daroga*, *Edgah*, *Bare Bhai Sahab* etc. Prem Chand died of gastric ulcer in 1936. His one son, Amrit Rai, was a renowned Hindi writer and the other Sripat Rai was a talented painter. Prem Chand was accorded the highest accolade of his time as he was called "Upanyas Samrat" (The King of Novels)

19.2 Introduction to 'Godan'

Godan (1936) literally means 'the gift of the cow.' It is his last complete novel. It is based on the theme of socio-economic deprivation and the exploitation of the village poor. *Godan* appeared in English translation in 1968. This translated novel by Gordon C. Roadarmel is a classic by itself. *Godan* was made into a Hindi film in 1963 starring Rajkumar, Mehmood and Shashikala. In 2004, *Godan* was part of the 26 episode TV series under the title 'Tehreer.....Munshi Premchand Ki', starring Pankaj Kapoor and Surekha Sikri and directed by Gulzar and produced by Doordarshan.

19.2.1 Explanation

The protagonist, Hori, is a poor peasant. He desperately longs for a cow- a symbol of both prosperity and prestige in the early twentieth century rural India. Hori does get a cow but he has to pay his life for it. After his death, the village priests demand a cow from his widow so that his soul may rest in peace. The pious act of *Godan*, the act of donating a cow by way of charity, is a significant Hindu ritual as it is regarded instrumental in dissolving one's sin and incurring divine blessings. *Godan* depicts Hori and Dhanias' struggle for survival in the village. The theme is still relevant because the Indian village in the interior rural and tribal belts remain what they were in the early twentieth century. Most of the farmers are illiterate and superstitious. They are still committing suicide and starving. They even burn the crop of sugarcane does not fetch the money enough to subsist. The farmers agitate and they are lathi-charged and even shot. Thus, it is high time Munshi Prem Chand's timeless voice was heard. Though he failed to convey his revolutionary progressive ideas through *Hans*, *Jagaran*, *Madhuri* and *Maryada* magazines, he succeeded admirably in his novels such as *Godan*. Premchand, who lived in an era of social and political turmoil of India, stood the test of time with his undaunted spirit. He saw the traditional village independence being destroyed by the colonisers. He regretted to see how the joint family system was getting morbidly disintegrated due to the pressure of increasingly centralised jobs in the urban areas. He noted the fall out of the large scale urbanization and consequent materialistic and acquisitional tendencies it triggered off. His stories and novels faithfully record and analyse these tendencies through the ordeals, trials and tribulations of his characters. Prem Chand observed keenly the psychology of a boy brought up in abject poverty. In the short story *Edgah*, the small boy goes with his relatively well-to-

do friends. He has a very little amount to spare for buying toys. He buys tongs (*chimta*) for his grandmother who often injured her finger-tips while baking *chapaties* on the hot iron plate (*tava*). His novel *Godan* narrates the story of a poor peasant Hori, groaning under heavy constraints of society and exploited by the privileged class. He undergoes his soul-destroying travails. Hori is subjected to unendurable troubles but he is never unjust. He is a genuine human being under hostile and unsavory conditions of life. Each novel and each short story of Prem Chand reminds us that infinitely gentle and innocent humanity is suffering rather too much. The circumstances may be grim but there is Divinity presiding over the affairs of mankind. There is a ray of hope for the sufferer. Prem Chand sees goodness in every human being and depicts his characters with clarity and succinctness. The mean and callous character also comes to suffer the qualms of conscience like Vaidya Lala Shankardas in *Amavasya Ki Raat*. Even the naive character is not without heroism. The protagonist in *Godan* is out to impress his newly wed wife. His story is narrated with understanding and empathy. His character Moteram Shastri is a gluttonous unscrupulous and greedy Pandit in *Mote Ramji Shastri* but Pandit Durganath is honest and principled man in *Pachtava*.

Premchand's stature as a socialist realist writer crystallises in his fiction. In *Godan* he exposed the organised structure of oppression which afflicted the rural India in his time. He identified the evils of his period in terms of poverty, exploitation of Dalits, superstitions, religious rituals, patriarchy, Zamindari system, colonialism and communalism. The later writings of Premchand are not based on liberal Gandhism but on socialist ideology. In his conversation with a Marathi writer T. Tikekar, he declared, "I am a communist but my communism is limited only to the extent that the Zamindars, seths and others, the exploiters of the peasants, should cease to exist." This is precisely the ideology manifested in his *Godan*. Premchand's ideas underwent certain change as his understanding of sociality changed. Sudhir Pachouri⁴ argues that in his short stories like *Tavan* (1931) and *Ahuti* (1930) the sentiment of nationalism is depicted as 'attractive and inspiring' but in the novels like *Rangbhumi* (1925) and *Karmabhumi* (1932) he unveils the sordid reality behind the ideological facade. He was sharply critical of the Indian freedom movement being turned into an opportunity for the dominant class to propagate its class interests. The fiction of Premchand has the characteristics of Thomas Hardy's and Charles Dickens's novels though he did not address the problems of the English underdog. He did not write for the English readers. He had never visited England or any other European country.

In Premchand's fiction, the poor are God for saken and pitiable. They struggle throughout their lives as Hori does. He is a God-fearing individual who faces the odds of life at every step. In *Godan*, the whole story is woven around 'Dharm' - the moral obligation. It is in the very centre. All else is on the periphery. Hori is rather unlucky and is nearly always in trouble: Hori's irresistible desire is to keep a cow which could be gifted away to a Brahmin in the event of death to redeem his sins. He does bring a cow but his jealous and quarrelsome brother poisons the cow and runs away. Hori is accused of killing the cow and the village elders order the penalty to be exacted from him. The landlord of Hori comes to know of it and usurps the

amount of penalty. The village elders- greedy hounds as they are- don't get a penny. Hori runs heavily in debt and his two oxen die. He is more or less a slave and his life is reduced to bonded labour. His only son, Gabar, falls in love with a child-widow who is 'expectant.' Hori does not ask her to leave in spite of social pressures. When Gabar leaves her at Hori's place and disappears, Hori is the object of unscrupulous defamation but he endures it all. The equation between Hori and Gobar is also disturbed and tense. At last he takes his unwed sweetheart to the town along with the new-born infant. Hori's daughters, by sheer good luck, are married off without dowry to prosperous men. Gobar finally returns and gets united with his patents. Hori wants to have a cow so that the grandson may get its milk for sustenance and wellness. The younger daughter of Hori has promised to let him have a cow. But Hori suddenly expires when his runaway brother happens to arrive. In his last moments he seems to visualise Jamadani's cow *Kaamdhenu*⁵ which can fulfill all his desire. This very brother forces Hori's widow Dhania for *Godan* the gift of the cow- to the Brahmin. She can't afford this and places a few petty coin on the cold hand of Hori and collapses.

19.2.2 Premchand's Feminism & Other Social Strands

From the feminist perspective, Prem Chand has been strongly criticized. Charu Gupta accuses him of categorizing his women protagonists into simplistic binaries. On one hand, they represent the ideal: Suffering mother figures who become the upholders of a feudal value system that glorifies chastity and feminine passivity. On the other hand, the anti-thesis of the ideal woman is the counter-model of the Westernized woman who is assertive, independent and aware of sexuality. Prem Chand was aware of the fact that if the poor rustic men suffered, their women counterparts suffered twice over. His novels *Godan*, *Gaban*, and *Nirmala* are hard hitting while his short stories are a scathing attack on the callous and heartless social forces of subjugation in colonial India.

What is most striking and perhaps the cause of Prem Chand's continuous relevance, is that the issues he raised in his fiction-short stories and novels- haunt Indian ethos even today. Both Vasudha Dalmia and Roadarmel⁶ present the literary and the social perspectives of *Godan* in their *Introduction* to the novel. Dalmia offers a critique of what she calls the two narrative frames of the work- the economic and social codes of Awadh on the one hand and the colonial and the nationalist politics on the other, through which different characters endure the ordeals of unbearable suffering. While Dalmia perceives *Godan* as *eminently political and progressive*, Roadarmel discusses Prem Chand's depiction of the 'change of heart' as the most potent force for the transformation of society. Quoting Munshi Prem Chand himself, he points out the interface of the didactic intentions with the novelists literary sensibility. "Idealism has to be there", says Prem Chand in 1934, 'even though it should not militate against realism and naturalness.

With the protagonist Hori in the centre, *Godan* tells the epic story of a wide range of characters situated in a complex of social reality- rural as well as urban, filtered through a

progressive consciousness and yet committed to an authentic portrayal. It is quite right to state that a classic literary work gains in meaning and relevance with the passage of time. This is aptly illustrated by Vasudha Dalmia and Roadarmel in their *Introduction to Godan*. Vasudha Dalmia makes a pertinent point when she discerns how Prem Chand presented in his fiction an understanding of social reality decades before academic scholarship could squarely face it. She suggests the use of some essays from the volumes of Subaltern studies published in the early eighties for a greater comprehension of *Godan* through the political and social history of Awadh. Similarly, the Bakhtian term ‘parodic stylization’ applied to some of Prem Chand’s masterly strokes in *Godan* gives added meanings to the double-edged tone of the author in describing the so called authority figures in society such as Pandit Nokha Ram, Jhinguri Singh or Brahmin Matadeen.

The 2002 *Introduction* indicates the subtlety and complexity of the thematic issues emerging through the narrative of *Godan*, thanks to the sophisticated and advanced critical tools and knowledge accessible to the contemporary reader. Vasudha Dalmia identifies the immense tension between the *Dharma* of Hori and the socio-political pulls away from it and highlights the rebellion of Gabar and Dhanias as progressive strains in the novel. She shows how the novel unravels both helplessness of major characters in the face of social practice and notions of piety upheld by most people in society.

19.2.3 On Roadarmel’s Translation of ‘Godan’

Roadarmel’s *Introduction* (1968) addresses the readers of the West in establishing the significance of the novel in Hindi literature. “Novels in English dealing with India unusually spell out the unfamiliar cultural details for the Western reader,” says Roadarmel. The statement is debatable. Roadarmel demonstrates the extraordinary precolonial sensitivity when he remarks, “One of the attractions of novels written first in an Indian language is that one can explore the situation from within the local context, not feeling that the author is catering to the English readers, that he is dealing not with the curious or the exotic but with matters of concern to those within the culture.” To the translator of Prem Chand’s *Godan*, the distinct specificity of the text is significant. He does not add any explanatory notes and annotations to the text nor does he give any footnotes. He only translates and consciously exercises his choice of words and phrases working out his strategies and does exceptionally well in involving the reader. Roadarmel has done some fiction editing in the process of translating the novel to take care of the chronological and other inconsistencies in the novel. Since his objective of translation is to make the same joy available to the English reader as to the Hindi reader, Roadarmel has attempted to remain as close to the original text as he could, But he does point out any cause for deviations and the problems of idiom and style in having to move from the source language (Hindi) to the target language (English). Dalmia speaks of the language of heteroglossia intersecting each other in *Godan* which is what makes the novel difficult to translate. In fact, she gives examples to illustrate how Roadarmel could not escape some of the pitfalls created thus for the translators, even though there is no denying the durability of his translation of *Godan*.

The acid test for the successful text is its readability which depends on how autonomous it is. The very spirit of *Godan* vibrates in Roadarmel's translation. There are several other translated English versions of *Godan* but Roadarmel's translation surpasses all of them. It is a model of literary translation and the English readers liked it as they did Charles Dicken's or Thomas Hardy's novels.

19.2.4 Socio-Political Face of 'Godan'

Prem Chand's *Godan* holds a mirror to social reality of early twentieth century of rural India. Prem Chand depicts the Indian villages under the British rule through the characters of Hori, Dhania, Mehta, Malti, Datadeen, Matadeen, Jhunia, Silia, Rai Sahib and Mirza Khushed. It describes cultural backwardness and ignorance of the illiterate village folks before the awareness of a cultural renaissance was in vogue. Prem Chand exposes the character of social classes and their imperfections through Hori, Rai Sahab and Dhania. There is nearly always a strand of idealism behind the ground reality. Prem Chand observes it through the prism of socio-political-cultural reality and exposes the sinister forces of exploitation under colonialism, feudalism, Mahajan-styled capitalism, etc. Prem Chand depicts Hindu-Muslim communalism, caste-consciousness and social beliefs on the one hand, and the progression of freedom movement (*Swaraj*). There were frequent agitations, strikes, police firing, lathi-charge incidents during the early decades of the twentieth century. The British policies were increasingly oppressive. Gandhi had embarked upon the Satyagrah movement to resist the high-handed British rule and mobilized the masses against the foreign rule. In 1931, Sardar Bhagat Singh Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged. This kindled the fire of freedom movement. Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose rose as popular nationalist leaders. The common man was disillusioned and came out of the complacent slough of the past.

Imported goods flooded the markets and indigenous commodities became cheap. There was also reformist zeal against dowry and rural India smarting under hostile conditions of living. A sense of belligerence was taking root. Prem Chand's *Godan* is a remarkable document which highlights the emergence of a progressive idealism among the down-trodden who were eking out their existence in 1920s and 1930s. This was precisely the period when there was mass exodus of villagers as manual labourers to cities in which factories were located. This led to disintegration of joint families. *Godan* presents the total perspective of society in which feudal lords, Brahmin Pandits, mill-owners, urban labours, political activists are major constituents and there is an unflinching sense of potential transformation and change. Prem Chand's triad of three novels-*Rangbhumi*, *Karma Bhumi* and *Godan*- captures most comprehensively the social reality of the 1920s and 1930s. *Godan* is a document of Indian rural consciousness through the period of socio-political upheavals.

19.2.5 A Critique of 'Godan'

Socio-political scenario has undergone several changes but Prem Chand remains as

popular a writer as he was in mid-twentieth century. There have been many critics of Prem Chand's fiction. To name only a few, Dr. Ram Vilas Sharma, Indranath Madaan, Nanddulare Vajpai, Hansraj 'Rahbar', Mamath Nath Gupta, Rajeshwar Guru, Padma Singh Sharma 'Kamlesh', Mahendra Bhatnagar, Shyam Sunder Ghosh, Ramratan Bhatnagar, Triloki Narain Dixit, Tratap Narain Tandon, Vishyambhar 'Manav', Dr. Satyendra, Narendra Kihli, Ramdeen Gupta, K.K.Goyanka, Ganga Prasad Vimal, Ramdeen Gupta, Shailesh Zaidi etc have contributed to Prem Chand's critique. The articles by Janardan Prasad Jha, Shiv Ram Devi, Jenendra, Ram Baksh, Virabharat Talwar are no less significant in Prem Chand's criticism. It is stated that Munshi Prem Chand depicts on rural India but it is not a fact. His novels *Gaban*, *Nirmala*, *Pratigya*, *Vardan*, *Seva Sadan* are based exclusively on urban environment. Prem Chand is the most authentic painter of Pre-Independence India. Dr. Nagendra expresses the idea that Prem Chand's fiction doesn't probe into the psyche of characters. This is not a fact either. In *Manovriti*, *Nasha*, *Bare bhai Sahab*, *Lotary* and the like stories there is profound psychological exploration. He has probed fairly deeply into the psyche of his characters who struggle against the odds for larger fraction of their lives.

Godan treats both rural and urban social environments with equanimity. It is his strategy to present a total perspective of the then Indian ethos. Mirza Khurshed is as important as Hori. Prem Chand's perspective of Indian society is not myopoeic. Nand Dulare Vajpai calls *Godan* an epic of capitalist civilization. Prem Chand has the historical perception too. *Godan* refers to two villages- Belari and Semri. The rural area in *Karmabhumi* is around Benaras. *Premashram* has the rural areas around Gorakhpur. The rural area as depicted in *Godan* is Avadh. Both Belari and Semari fall under Lucknow district. Hajrat Ganj and Aminabad are two well-known streets (*Mohallas*) of Lucknow.

Godan, more truly speaking, is the epic of the farmer's life. Hori- the typical Indian peasant- is simpleton, God-fearing, fatalist, superstitious, ignorant, humble, victim of Brahminical ritualism. He wishes a cow lounging in the courtyard of the house to neutralize his sins of this world to enter the other world with pure sinless soul. Prem Chand's short story *Poos Ki Rat* anticipates *Godan*. Gabar represents the young progressive minded agitating generation.

It is alleged that Prem Chand was anti-Brahmin in his works. Brahmins are generally depicted as objects of hatred and ridicule. There are many Brahmin characters in *Godan*. It anticipates Shri Lal Shukla *Raag Darbari*, a classic of post-colonial India. Prem Chand included well educated and accomplished women. He knew the life of Anand Bhuvan in Allahabad. He was aware of Vijay Laxmi Pandit, foreign returned lady, and he knew that the feminists and progressive minded women rebelled against the customs and traditions. Most of them were deserted and divorced. They were not housewives beaten into routine.

Prem Chand was enamoured of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Bal Gangadhar Tilak as a young man. Tilak regarded Swaraj (Freedom) as the birth right of Indians and desired to get rid of the British rule at the earliest. With Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in India from South Africa and his headlong plunge into the freedom struggle, young Prem Chand became a

dedicated nationalist writer. His period of apprenticeship was over upto 1920. He was a feminist with a difference. He disapproved of the women with hypocritical sophistication and elitist style of the British ways and manners. At this time, higher classes which had thousands of convent-educated young men and women took pride in living like the British. They led club life and lived in luxury drinking English wines in birthday parties with a perceptible indifference to the people who worked very hard as low paid clerks, peasants, labourers, and factory workers. They spent extravagantly and regarded life as a bed of roses. *Godan* exposed this bourgeois class boldly and truthfully. Jai Ratan and P. Lal translated it in 1956. One Iren Zehra also came with the translation of *Godan* in Zurich. But Roadarmel's translation is far the best of all.

19.3 Annotations

1. Govind Narain Sharma: Prem Chand: Novelist and Thinker (Pragati Publications, Delhi.1999)
2. Literally, the word '*Godan*' cannot be translated as 'a gift of the cow'. 'Daan' is not equivalent to 'gift'. It is not just 'charity'. It is not 'donation' either. It is a religious ritual to offer a cow to a Brahmin to get one's sins neutralised.
3. *Marayada, Madhuri, Hans and Jagaran* were literary magazines edited by Prem Chand from time to time. They had very few subscribers. Prem Chand could not requisition sufficient money to continue their regular publication. Moreover, he was heavily in debt.
4. Sudhir Pachouri is a formidable Marxist critic. He has studied *Godaan* between the lines from the Marxist critical prism.
5. In *Bhagvat Puran*, there is a reference to Kaamdheni- a miraculous and charismatic cow that can fulfil all human desires.
6. Prem Chand: *Godaan* Trans. Gordon Roadarmel (1968)

19.4 Let Us Sum Up

Prem Chand as a novelist has been compared with Charles Dickens. The British readers who were well-acquainted with Thomas Hardy's and Charles Dickens's characters read Prem Chand's *Godan* with a fetish in English translation. Roadarmel's translation of *Godaan* clicked as a classic. Prem Chand had been deeply influenced by Leo Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, Romain Rolland, Maxim Gorky and Rabindra Nath Tagore. He had translated some works of Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Galsworthy. He shares much with Dickens's fiction. Just as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* has epic dimensions of Russian life, *Godan* depicts the epic dimensions of Indian life of the early decades of the twentieth century. Prem Chand has admirably succeeded in recognising the social and psychological hiatus between

the high and low classes. His class consciousness highlights the inherent hostility between them. *Godan* shows the same structural frame works which Charles Dickens has in *A Tale of Two Cities*. There are two distinct hostile groups of characters in *Godan* as in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Prem Chand has employed the technique of Dickens's fiction to suit his purpose Prem Chand's approach is not didactic but suggestive. He narrates as a realist and leaves the rest to the reader. Hori is victimised by the village elders, Brahmin pandits. Bhota takes away his oxen callously. Hori as a protagonist in *Godan* undergoes fruitless struggle against the social order because he has traditional moral obligations to live by come what may. He is out and out a good human being. He knows his destiny.

Prem Chand did not have the Western reader in my mind. Like Mohammad Iqbal, and Rabindra Nath Tagore he was neither western-educated nor had he visited England. He had not studied Herman Hess or Gunther Grass. He was an indogenous genius- a home spun talent.

19.5 Review Questions

1. Discuss the major influences on Prem Chand.
2. What are the themes in *Godaan*?
3. Comment upon Roadarmel's Translation of *Godaan*.
4. Make your observations on Hori as the protagonist in *Godaan*.
5. Discuss *Godaan* as a socio-political document of Colonial India in the early decades of the twentieth century.

19.6 Bibliography

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UNIT-20

U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY : SAMSKARA

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
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20.1 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Anantha Murthy 's novel, *Samskara*:

- life and works of Anantha Murthy
- thematic analysis of the novel
- social pressures and individual consciousness
- Caste as character in society
- Art of Characterization

20.1 Introduction

U. R. Anantha Murthy (Udupi Rajagopala Acharya Anantha Murthy) is counted among the most eminent Indian authors, who have left an indelible impression not only in the language they have written originally, but also in the total corpus of contemporary literature. He is one of the most important representatives of the new movement in the literature of the Kannada language, but his literary appeal has definitely transcended it. A prolific writer, he has been the winner of a number of awards both from the Government and also Academies for his invaluable

contribution in different fields. In 1998 he was awarded with the prestigious Padma Bhushan award. In 1994 he won the Jnanapeeth, India's highest literary award. Besides these, he has won other awards including the Literary Distinction, awarded by the Government of Karnataka in 1984. Karnataka Sahitya Akaemi conferred the Fiction Award and Award for Literary Achievement, in the year 1983 and 1984 respectively. He won the Masti Award in Literature in the year 1994. He is also the winner of the Ganakrishti Award for Literary Distinction, Kolkatta, for the year 2002. Besides these, he has been the winner of a number of awards from the Karnataka Film Development Corporation for best stories like Samskara, Ghatashradda, Bara etc. at different times. Ananth Murthy is particularly known for his novel *Samskara*, a highly-acclaimed Kannada novel that has been widely translated and made into a film by Girish Karnad. The novel portrays individual and social conflicts at several levels simultaneously. He was a visiting lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania when he contextualized the writing and reception of the novel.

20.2 Life of Ananthamurthy

U.R. Anantha Murthy was born on December 21, 1932 at Melige, a remote Village in Tirthahalli Taluka, in Shimoga District. He was born into a traditional Brahmin family and was educated in Sanskrit and Kannada as well as in English. The impact of this rare mixed education is evident on his thematic handlings, as well as on his characterization. In several of his works, he has put traditional questions in a present day context and reviewed them from the perspective of a modern man – yet his empathy with the tradition can always be discerned. Perhaps the roots of several of the themes – conflicts and resolutions – can be traced to his early education pattern. He had his early education in Durvasamatha Sanskrit school. He had his later education in Thirthahalli and Mysore. He completed his graduation and post-graduation from the University of Mysore. After doing his post-graduation in English literature, he went to England for higher studies. In 1966, he earned Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Birmingham, U.K. for his thesis on “English and Comparative literature.” Here he worked with Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, and Raymond Williams.

He began his career as a Lecturer in English in 1956 at Mysore University and later became a Professor. A distinguished scholar, he has taught at various universities in Europe and the United States. He has served as a Visiting Professor at the Cornell University (2001), University of Iowa (1975), Shivaji University (2001), University of Iowa (1975), Shivaji University, Kolhapur (1982), University of Turbingen, Germany (1992), University of Pennsylvania (2000), University of Hyderabad (2001), and many other universities. During the period 1987 to 1990, he served as the Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. Besides, he has also served as the Chairman of the National Book Trust of India at Delhi in 1992-93, Indian Institute of Society Sciences in 1998 and The Film and Television Institute of India at Pune in 2002. He was the President of the Sahitya Akademi from 1993 to 1998.

U.R. Anantha Murthy is also well-known for his oratory. He has traveled widely around the globe. He has undertaken innumerable tours, attended several national and international conferences and has given a number of lectures on various topics since 1974.

He undertook tours as an Indian delegate to West Germany in 1988 representing University Grants Commission. As a cultural representative he visited North Korea and Republic of China in 1998. He visited Moscow as member of the International Advisory Board of Inostrannaya Littterature (Soviet Monthly) in 1989. In the year 2002 he visited Book Festivgals at France, Berlin and Munich.

He has delivered lectures on varied areas such as politics, culture, literature, art and a number of other issues. Important ones to be noted are the lecture on “Culture and Destiny,” given at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, “Indian Literature,” at the University of Madison and Chieagon in 1985, “Indian Society, Culture, Politics, and Literature” delivered at the University of Birmingham, Alambama in 1987, “Colinialism and Indian Literature” delivered at University of California, “Art in the Modern Age” at Bangalore University in 1989. He has served on many important committees as Member and Chairman. He has interviewed many celebrities for television and documentaries.

20.3 Works of Ananthamurthy

The creative genius of U.R. Anantha Murthy is reflected in his prolific writings. Majority of his writing is in Kannada. His works can be classified into stores, poems, novels and essays. He began his literary career in 1955 with the story volume Endendhigu Mugiyada Kathe. Other story collections include works like Mauni (1967), Prashne (1962), Akasha Mattu Bekku (1983), Mooru Dasakada Kathegalu (1989), Suryana Kudure (1995) and Aidu Dashakada Kathegalu (2001). His poetry collections like Mithuna (1992), Ajjana Hegala Sukkugalu (1989), 15 Padyagalu (1967), Eevareginal Kavithegalu (2001), Eevareginal Kavithegalu (2001) have gripped the imagination of the readers. His essays include Prajne Mattu Parisara (literary) and philosophical essays), Samakshama (essays on politics, culture, society, literature), Yuga Pallata (Essays), Abhinava (2001) Kannada, Karnataka (selected essays 2001). His novels include Samskara (1965), which has been translated into English, Russian, French, Hungarian, German, Swedish, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Urdu, Tamil and Gujarati; Bharathipura (1974), Divya (2001) and others.

His contribution to English language is no way less than to Kannada. Many of his works in Kannada have been translated into English by different authors. For instance, ‘*Initiation*’ is a Kannada story translated by Gary Wills, *Avasthe* a novel, translated by Shanthinath Desai, *Bhava* and *Twenty Vachanas* from Sunya Sampadane is a set of twenty poems translated from Kannada by Judith Kroll; *Bharathipura*, a novel, has been translated by P. Srinivasa Rao. The other works in English include essays on various topics like “*Literature and Culture*” (2002). “*The Concept of Man in Kannada Literature?* (1979) and others. At present U.R. Anantha Murthy is settled in Bangalore.

Anantha Murthy's short novel *Samskara* created a big rumpus in Karnataka when it was published more than thirty years ago. The novel has enjoyed unprecedented popularity and is still highly relevant. The questions it had initially posited, are the questions which still trouble the Indian psyche. The novel has been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Urdu, Marathi, Oriya, Gujarati and Konkani languages of India. It has also been translated into several European languages including English, French, Russian, Hungarian, German and Kazak. In 1970 it was made into a movie of the same name by Girish Karnad and was crowned with many awards including the President's Gold medal. It is one of the few art films of its kind in the Kannada language and started a new wave of author films in India.

With this novel Anantha Murthy, a Brahmin himself, held aloft a mirror to the Brahmin community. The novel raises the question of defining the quintessence of culture – is it achieved by blindly following rules, customs, conventions and traditions, is it lost when they are ignored? The background for this eternal question, which actually remains unresolved even in this novel, is the *Samskara* (last rites or funeral) of Naranappa, a Brahmin who had himself rejected his brahminhood. The word *Samskara* is significant for comprehending the novel as it has multi-layered connotations. Among the several meanings of this Sanskrit word, some of the important ones are culture, funeral and ritual.

20.4 Analysis of the Novel '*Samskara*'

20.4.1 Story of the novel

The story of *Samskara* unfolds in a village which is very much like the village of Anantha Murthy's own childhood - where tensions between tradition and modernity emerged daily in people's experiences. Against this complex background, he questions discrimination through the caste system and the repressive beliefs/practices of the Brahmins. It does not simply stop at the portrayal of the bigotry, untouchability and atrocity perpetuated in the name of religious practices, but goes beyond the clichéd themes and also presents before us the internal conflicts which are faced by any sensitive Brahmin in such a situation. The reason of the appeal which *Samskara* has had for readers having diverse sensitivities, perhaps can be understood by the fact that the author has foregrounded the dilemma of individual suffering within a social context. The novel challenges the orthodox concepts of a community in Karnataka. As a religious novel about a decaying Brahmin colony in the south Indian village of Karnataka, it serves as an allegory rich in realistic detail, a contemporary reworking of ancient Hindu themes and myths, and a serious, poetic study of a religious man living in a community of priests gone to seed. A death which stands as the central event in the plot brings in its wake a plague, many more deaths, live questions with only dead answers, moral chaos, and the rebirth of one man.

20.4.2 Theme of the novel

Anantha Murthy is known far beyond the Indian language borders and abroad on

account of his books and social engagements. The themes which are his central focus are the examination of the caste system, religious rules and traditions as well as the ambivalent relationship between the handed down cultural value system and the values of a changing world. In both his fiction and essays, he tries to demolish the hegemonic power structures that canons impose on us.

Caste permeates every pore of Indian society in veiled but sinister ways. It is a complex and rigid phenomena, difficult to comprehend in its entirety. Few Indians begin to understand it completely, although it is present in our lives in subtle and not-so subtle ways. Even though the caste hierarchy is basically a Hindu construct, it has affected other socio-religious groups too in India. Conversion does not always help: Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs and Muslims often still cling to their caste identities when searching for marriage partners. It is the other face of India; the one that nobody likes to see. It is in sharp contrast to the progressive, emerging technological force, India has been projected to have become. The British also did not interfere with the caste based discrimination as it was in consonance with their divide and rule policies. In some ways they even reinforced it, finding it useful to serve the interests of the British Empire faithfully.

The word caste has been etymologically derived from the Portuguese language. It means breed or race. In Sanskrit language, the equivalent word is *varna*, which changes its meaning according to the context in which it is used and can denote several meanings simultaneously; for example, form, quality, class, category, race, merit or virtue. The caste system is very intricate and complicated, and often generates sweeping generalizations. Some sociologists suggest that parallels can be seen with the European system of guilds that divided artisans into separate social and economic entities on the basis of their specialization and sub-specializations. The system must have developed out of necessity as a stratified and hierarchical socio-economic order to absorb different people within a homogeneous social structure. Eventually, however, it came to signify an endogamic group, in which the members might have been linked by heredity, matrimony, conventional practices and profession. Whole groups of people must have taken on a new identity which was associated with the economic activity of their *gotra* (clan). In India, however, the system further grew into a monolithic structure in which an individual was slated by birth in a particular life style. The flexibility which the European guilds were able to possess was severely stifled in India. The social practices governing the rigidity of the caste system, and the taboos against inter-caste marriage and free mixing soon degenerated into an inflexible hierarchical structure of social inequality in which one's rank is ascribed at birth and little or no mobility is allowed out of the position to which a person is born. It has thus injured human progress and abetted suffering leaving personal competence and caliber in jeopardy. Since literature reflects society, it was only natural that Indian writing involves itself with the caste issue too. This important aspect of Hindu social structure has been portrayed in various works of fiction. In *Samskara* too, its intriguing complexities are not only subtly woven in the thematic motifs, but are also reflected in the development of various characters.

The caste system is based upon the organization of society in four distinct classes, traditionally known as *chaturvarana*. The origin of this division can be found in *Purusha Sukta*, the Ninetieth Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda. The *Purusha Sukta* is a theory of the origin of the universe, a cosmogony. The Egyptians also had an elaborate theory about it. Another similar cosmogony is found in Chapter 1 of the Genesis in the Old Testament. Cosmogonies have never been more than matters of academic interest. This is true of some parts of the *Purusha Sukta*, but not of the whole of it: verses 11 and 12 fall in one category and the rest of the verses fall in another. Verses other than 11 and 12 are not in common circulation. Verses 11 and 12 contain the origin and classification of castes. A centuries old tradition treats them as containing a mandatory injunction from the creator to the effect that society must be constituted on the basis of four classes mentioned in the Sukta. These verses contain a divine injunction prescribing a particular form of the constitution of Society.

It is said that there are four castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Among these, each preceding caste is superior by birth to the one following. *Purusha* is said to be a symbol of the universe, immortal and supreme, who has been given human attribute. It is said that the Brahmin was his mouth, the Kshatriya formed his arms, the Vaishya his thighs and the Shudra was born from his feet. This theory was later on incorporated in other religious texts, including the *Apastamba Dharma Sutra*, *Vashishtha Dharma Sutra*, the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Harivansha Purana*, the *Satpatha Brahmin* and the *Manu Smriti* etc. Alan Dundes, a Professor of Anthropology and Folklore at the University of California at Berkeley, has offered a Freudian analysis of caste and untouchability in his book *Two Tales of Sparrow and Crow* (Rowman Littlefield, 1997). His argument is that the caste system is based on the persistent, obsessive fear that the top, clean mouth might be contaminated or defiled from the bottom. This fear underlies and permeates the entire caste system. This also explains why a higher caste person cannot accept food from the hands of a lower caste - feet are dirty because they are in contact with the outside ground where faeces might lurk.

Whatever arguments may be presented, the fact remains that the Indian society, particularly the Hindus, have promoted the division of people into castes which are hierarchically placed groups in a stepladder of ascending superiority and descending inferiority. Traditionally it was thought that people who are born into a particular caste should follow the ordained caste professions and marry only within their caste through arranged marriages. In order to preserve the divisions and protect the sanctity of hierarchy, taboos were placed on food and marriage. A person could not eat food prepared or even touched by a person belonging to a lower caste. Similarly, inter-caste marriages were not allowed.

It is evident that the caste system still occupies an important place in the Hindu religion, as well as in the organization of the society. The primary aim and ideal of all religions is the emancipation of all its followers, especially that of the weaker sections and the downtrodden. So it is strange that caste based discriminatory practices have been allowed in the name of religion and theoretical explanations based on Puranic stories and religious myths are presented

to support and justify such thinking.

U.R. Anantha Murthy's novel *Samskara* traces several contemporary social practices – conscious as well as unconscious – and discusses how in daily life caste becomes the basis of labor division, social discrimination and gender exploitation.

The story of *Samskara* revolves round the life in an *agrahara*, a narrow street in which brahmins belonging to the Madhwa community live. They are the followers of guru Madhwa, a famous ancient sage. Shankara, Madhwa and Ramanuja are the three most famous philosophers of ancient India. The *agrahara* of *Samskara* is situated in a tiny hamlet called Durvasapura, somewhere in the western ghats (mountain range) of southern India. The community which has been portrayed in *Samskara* is a decadent one, narrow-minded, bigoted, selfish and greedy. The novel portrays how when one follows religion blindly, it does not remain a liberating force anymore. Their Brahmins of the *agrahara* do not understand either the suggestivity or the meaning of a ritual, their religious practices are limited only to follow rules and traditions which are thousands of years old. They do not understand why they follow the rules. They do not care to understand. They are afraid that if they do not follow the rules, disasters will fall upon them. Such practices, owing to lack of education and empathy were not uncommon in contemporary India, yet the *agrahara* which has been portrayed in the novel is famous in the surrounding area, because of two brahmins who live there. One of them is Praneshacharya and the other one is Naranappa.

The novel begins with the death of Naranappa by bubonic plague. Naranappa, though a Brahmin by birth, had opposed everything traditional brahminism had stood for. In his life he had violated all the taboos propagated and fostered by the brahminic culture of the *agrahara*, which was an exclusively orthodox colony. The question which his death immediately raises is whether a person can reject the caste he/she has been born into by violating the traditional code of conduct linked with a particular caste – in other words, can Naranappa be still considered a Brahmin and his last rites performed accordingly while he had repudiated all social ethical codes? The Brahmins face the dilemma of conducting his last rites without inviting social ostracism and wait for the decision of Praneshacharya in this regard. Praneshacharya, the protagonist of the novel, is the spiritual guide of the *agrahara* Brahmins. Initially it is his ascetic Brahmin identity, which is introduced to the readers. But he also possesses greater compassion, understanding and tolerance of human failing, traits which lead him to an empathy (and consequent sexual intercourse) with Naranappa's mistress, the prostitute Chandri. Praneshacharya's sketch, and also other discourses which inform us of action, underline the disastrous dimensions of the caste calculus in the *agrahara*.

The caste system has often been branded as the hidden apartheid practiced in India. The conventional Indian society took what were essentially divisions of labour and dictated that everyone had a predestined, preordained station in life. To ensure that this diktat was obeyed, an elaborate religious system was developed which insisted that one's birth in this life was directly related to one's sins or good deeds in the last one. Hence everyone had to accept this

rigid system which controlled society and totally prohibited social mobility.. Disobedience could result in severe punishments.

Thus we see that the concept of the caste which has crystallized in the Indian social structure was made doubly rigorous by integrating it with religion. The cyclical theory of rebirth, with the possibility of birth in a higher caste being linked to faithfully carrying out one's duties as per caste rules generated a fatalistic acceptance of one's situation. The pseudo-religious practices of untouchability and endogamy which segregated one caste from another, apart from the various social privileges, drilled into the minds of people that caste is a preordained and hereditary institution which has divine sanction. *Samskara* also indicates the relationship between the division of labour and caste. Brahmins were originally the people who preached spiritual teachings to the society and lived ascetic spiritual lives. The Mahabharata defines a Brahmin as one who is truthful, forgiving and kind. Praneshacharya, the protagonist of the novel, is such an example. He possesses these qualities and devotedly practices his religious duties. Known as Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning, he visits the Maruti temple daily for worship. The Brahmins of the *agrahara* assemble at his place daily to listen to his recitation of sacred legends (1). In all religious matters, he is the ultimate arbiter. People look up to him for guidance and consolidation. He is highly respected by all. The Brahmin wives ask their husbands to wait till he has reached a decision about Naanappa's last rites (4). He embodies the virtuous facets of traditional Brahmin cult with its emphasis on learning, asceticism and compassion. Even Naranappa, who has been as presented to him, has to accept it grudgingly, "my only sorrow is that there's no brahminism left to destroy in this place-except you." (23) Looking at him Chandri recalls her mother who used to say that prostitutes should get pregnant by such holy men, "he had such looks, virtues; he glowed. But one had to be lucky to be blessed by such people." (46) When Chandri and Praneshacharya together return from the Maruti temple, she is conscious of the "great good fortune that had suddenly rushed into her life." (68)

Traditionally Brahmins depended on performing religious rituals for their livelihood. Absence of any other skill often resulted in acute poverty in a world which was shifting towards major changes in its socio-economic views and practices. *Samskara* graphically portrays the constrictions of a caste based economic choice. Brahmins of the *agrahara* are poor and ill fed. Lakshmanacharya is depicted as having "sunken cheeks, yellow eyes deep in sockets, ribs protruding . . . altogether an unbalanced body." (4). Dasacharya lived "entirely on the meals that Brahmins get at death-rite and anniversaries." (8). Untrained in any alternate skill, hesitant to accept new ways, these Brahmins are as much a victim of the caste system as the lower castes. Their blinkered vision smothers the spontaneity of their life.

The listless poverty of the Brahmins of the *agrahara* is presented in the novel through various episodes. They depended on cucumber during the rainy season for everything, "curry, mash, or soup made with the seeds." (16) They could walk a distance of thirty miles just for attending a festival feast. Comparing Belli with other Brahmin girls, Shripati scathingly remarks, "cheek sunken, breast withered, mouth stinking of lentil soup." (37) Such incidents describe

the poverty of the Brahmins, who are traditionally linked with professional choices and cannot escape them. When Praneshcharya takes up wandering, he is approached by a villager who requests him to read “a bit of the future.” (95) Praneshacharya was about to perform the routine Brahmin functions by sheer habit, when he reins himself suddenly and ruefully ponders that one cannot run away from one’s caste, “Even if I leave everything behind, the community clings to me, asking me to fulfill duties the Brahmin is born to.” (96) The inescapability of the caste is discernible in the debate which followed Naranappa’s death. He had violated and profaned all codes of conduct, still he could not be treated as an outcaste and “remains a Brahmin in his death.” (9)

Another aspect of caste based discrimination which *Samskara* presents before us is related with the taboos which prohibit a Brahmin to eat food touched/prepared by a member of a different caste. Religious treatises like the Vashishtha Dharma Sutra specify what may be eaten and what may not. It stipulates that a Brahmin cannot eat food given by a Shudra. The caste system accepts and encourages a rigid hierarchical structure of social inequality – the greater one’s purity, or lack of contact with pollution, the higher one’s rank is. Dasacharya is afraid of social criticism, if he openly eats food at Manjayya’s place. Being a smarta, Manjayya is considered to belong to a lower sect of Brahmins. Dasacharya is afraid that if he eats “cooked stuff in a Smarta house” (57), he may be socially boycotted by his own sect, “I don’t really mind eating in your house. But if those rascals in our agrahara hear about it, no one will invite me to a ceremony again. What can I do, Manjayya?” When Manjayya amusedly assures him of secrecy, Dasacharya asks for some milk, jaggery and plain flat-rice. Secretly delighted that an agrahara Brahmin had come to eat with them, his wife gleefully serves him. Naranappa did not practice such discrimination, yet Chandri was unable to come to terms with his unorthodox behaviour. She repeatedly requests him not to eat food cooked by her (45). Society can perhaps pardon Naranappa for having close relationship with a lowcaste prostitute, but the fact that he ate what Chandri cooked is still graver; Lakshmana’s statement, in which he lays emphasis on the fact that he, in addition to having a mistress, even ate food cooked by her, makes it amply clear.

Contact with a person of a lower caste can negatively alter one’s purity and may require some form of remedial procedure, such as bathing or changing clothes. When Chandri calls at Praneshacharya’s home to inform him about Naranappa’s death, he had yet to take his meal. The readers are told how he will have to bathe again to purify himself if he talks to Chandri before taking his food, “If the Acharya talked to her, he would be polluted; he would have to bathe again before his meal.” (2) Being a traditional Brahmin, Praneshacharya has been conditioned not to eat food cooked or served by a person who belongs to a lower caste. It is a commonly followed practice as other people also know and respect this constraint. Putta takes the Acharya to a Brahmin restaurant for a coffee, telling him that they keep a special place inside for orthodox Brahmins like him. Still fearing the presence of some familiar person, the Acharya is worried as it may have a ripple effect later on, “If someone sees the crest Jewel of Vedanta Philosophy drinking a cup of polluted restaurant coffee.” (115) Afraid

of entering a temple and eating there during the period of his wife's mourning, he realizes that he would never have the courage to defy Brahmin practices as Naranappa had done (116). Many anthropologists have remarked on the critical importance of pollution to the caste system. A non-brahmin, particularly a shudra, an untouchable, is never considered clean enough either to share food with the brahmin, or even to touch him. When Chandri requests Sheshappa, the cartman, to cremate Naranappa's body, he refuses, "Chandravva, that can't be done. Do you want me to go to hell, meddling with a brahmin corpse? Even if you give me all eight kinds of riches, I can't." (69-70). The internalization of caste hierarchy can also be seen in Putta's attempts to climb the caste ladder by denying the social background of his mother. He tells Praneshacharya that he is a Malera; though his mother belonged to a lower caste and was not married to his father who was a high-class Brahmin. He flaunts the scared thread and claims that all his buddies are Brahmin boys (112).

20.4.3 Women Characters and construction of Gender

Samskara has different types of women characters. At the same time, it also foregrounds suggestively, how the traditional society encourages people to internalize the practices and thought patterns of gender. Whereas sexual differences are biological, gender is a social construct and its understanding is structured in accordance with one's cultural background.

Individual cognition of gender is often influenced and conditioned by one's perception of social stereotypes, and therefore may not remain agentic. Whereas sexual differences are biological and fixed, the notion of gender is a variable constructed by the society. Feminist critics have argued that the "true woman" is an "artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made."¹ The social concept of feminine submissiveness mutilates the assertiveness of women and goads them to seek their fulfillment through domesticity or through others. The social structures of a society, which also control systems of power, impart a particular shape to the concept of gender. "People are made into social men and women by the particular positions which they are allocated in the social order. To understand what it is to be a man or woman in a given society is to grasp the social relations involved."² In patriarchal set-ups, gender divisions are exploitative and oppressive for women. They are treated as subordinate to men. Individual and social understanding of gender notions is reflected in literary texts through characters, plot development, imagery, and symbolism and language practices. *Samskara* too is not an exception. It poignantly illustrates the indoctrination of centuries, as far as the role and status of women are concerned, against a rural South Indian backdrop. It also shows how this society endeavors to stifle the individuality of women in a gradual but planned way, and encourages men to be insensitive towards it.

Samskara presents the life of a brahmin agrahara through its protagonist, Praneshacharya. The descriptions are not only replete with local accouterments; they also reverberate with an inner continuance of traditional attitudes towards women. The novel transparently displays the novelist's unquestioned acceptance of the prevalent notions about

gender roles; the desire to penetrate deeper into the psyche of women is conspicuously absent. A closer study of the women characters of the novel underscores this point.

In the story of the novel, women characters primarily appear in two contexts, namely the economic and the sexual. The economic aspect reveals the passivity and dependence on men as far as upper class women are concerned. Brahmin women are depicted as being absolutely dependent on their men folk for their livelihood. Since Brahmin men are unable to earn a decent living, these women have to lead their life in abject poverty. They also have to follow the rigidity of traditional religious practices and take care of their children. Such hardships and deprivations generate a lust and greed for money in most of them. The novel repeatedly refers to the brahmin women's greed and their lust for gold. When Chandri offers her ornaments for meeting out the expenses of Naranappa's death rites, the brahmin women are mesmerized, "The women calculated swiftly; that heap of gold was worth at least two thousand rupees. One after another the wives scanned the husbands' faces." (10) Again, the brahmins' internal bickering and indecisiveness infuriates them, "The women kept staring at the heap of gold and they were disappointed by their husbands' words." (12) Garuda's wife Sitadevi and Lakshmana's wife Anasuya persuade their husbands to visit Praneshacharya to plead their cases (28-33).

Samskara also shows how in conventional gendered thinking women are denied appreciation for finishing the daily chores. Women of the *agrahara* are also denied the acknowledgment of their daily labour in performing the household tasks. Wherever such activities are mentioned, specific reference to women has not been made. Their work, which is repetitive and therefore unending, is taken for granted. Decorating the threshold, sprinkling of cowdung water in the courtyard, preparation of food, preserving vegetables for the rainy season, washing of the clothes and disciplining the children are some domestic activities which the narrative clearly links with women. Yet the women themselves are never illustrated as active agents. Their presence is peripheral, though the life of the *agrahara* depends on their labour for smooth functioning. The cajole their children to remain inside to avoid the overwhelming stench (51), prepare food (52), preserve cucumbers for the rainy season (16), ritually wash saris (14); however, the performance of all such duties is taken for granted and is not equated with any positive contribution.

Samaskara also highlights the superstitious attitudes against women, perpetuated by social customs. Praneshacharya cannot shift his wife when the rest of the Brahmins decide to send away their families to their in-laws, as she had started her period (80). Abhorrence for impurities, conventionally associated with the bodily functions of women, is a belief cherished in all patriarchal set-ups, which systematically nurtures a consciousness of their secondary status among women. Praneshacharya, seeped into the values of traditional brahminic culture, unquestioningly accepts such values. Disturbed by the eerie silence of the *agrahara* and the pervading stench, he had taken refuge in the forest which was still resonant with the memories of Chandri. Towards the evening when he returns to the *agrahara*, he finds that his invalid wife

is flushed with fever. He hesitates before checking her temperature, “how can I touch a woman polluted by her menstrual blood.” (84) Nalini Natrarajan in her notes has commented on the untouchability of women during their menstrual cycle.³ Remembering the stories from scriptures Praneshacharya used to narrate, Shripati vividly remembers a description, “Like the thighs of a blossoming woman, pure after her monthly baths.” (38) Tradition encourages men to treat women only as sex objects.

Brahmin women live in the background. Not only their household chores have been mentioned independent of any association with their labour, they are invariably portrayed occupying the periphery after having surrendered the centrestage to their men. With meek silence they listen to the lengthy discussions about Naranappa’s burial. Stunned by Chandri’s generosity of surrendering her ornaments, they gaze at their husbands’ faces. When Anasuya, Lakshmana’s wife, blurts out her anger with snide comments and sobs, she is conveniently ignored. They are mute listeners, forbidden by custom to be direct participants in any decision making process. Among other talks, they also listen to the frivolous licenses their husbands and their ancestors have had with lowcaste women and prostitutes. Durgabhata cackles about how the ancient sages had cohabited with Dravidian women (6), Garudacharya quotes the folklore about Shankaracharya occupying the dead body of a king for gaining fuller experience of life (6-7), Lakshmana talks about Naranappa enjoying food cooked by Chandri, a lowcaste prostitute and his mistress (6), Praneshacharya narrates the erotic stories from the religious texts (24). Women, however, never have a direct participation in dialogue. Their conditioned sensitivity is being used as a tool to further the patriarchal order and to ensure the continuity of their servility.

The traditional constraints on the sexual liberty of Brahmin women often result in their acceptance of passivity. They accept their marriages and put up with several hardships. Still their husbands are not satisfied as they want a certain lack of inhibitions in their wives’ sexual behaviour – an attitude which has not been allowed to become a part of their nature by conventional constraints, rigidity of religious taboos and debilitating poverty. Anantha Murthy’s description of Brahmin women in the *Samskara* repeatedly stresses their lack of sexuality. He highlights their traditional, socially defined and pre-fixed roles only. Unequivocal denial of sexual exuberance to Brahmin women somehow mitigates their autonomous identity, acting simultaneously as an abetting factor for their husband’s infidelity. Their lack of sexual charm is offered almost as an excuse for Naranappa’s and Shripati’s desertion of their wives. Naranappa and others frequently refer to the folklore of matsyagandha (23). Naranappa goes to the extent of advising Praneshacharya to “push those sickly wives of yours into the river. Be like the sages of your holy legends – get hold of a fish – scented fisherwoman.” (26) Shripati is equally vocal, “which Brahmin girl – cheek sunken, breast withered, mouth stinking of lentil soup – which Brahmin girl was equal to Belli?” (37) His own wife Lilavati has been described as “short, plump and round, a nose-ring in, one nostril . . . Wearing a dwarfish braid of hair very tight.” (31) Even her mother’s heart hardens whenever she looks at her. Her constant denial to impart conjugal bliss to her husband drives him towards Belli. It is ironical that in such

episodes blame has been put on women and never on men.

The illustrations of the brahmin women in *Samskara* clearly substantiates how gender formation is organically linked with the concept of caste within Indian social milieu. Patriarchal norms become doubly rigid within the stratification of caste. Traditional marriages can take place only within the same caste; there are also rigid laws governing the partaking of food with members of other groups. Similarly, each caste has its taboos as far as the behavioural norms of women are concerned. The inviolability of taboos is relaxed for men, as is evident in the case of Naranappa. Despite his flagrant repudiation of social norms, the agrahara Brahmins are unable to excommunicate him, “he may have rejected Brahminhood, but brahminhood never left him. No one ever excommunicated him officially.”(9)

In stark contrast to the shriveled sensuality of the brahmin women, *Samskara* portrays women like Chandri and Belli, who belong to lower castes and almost flaunt their exuberant sexuality. They have been depicted as possessing a vigorous sensuality and prefer a direct participation in life. The relaxed constrictions about their movements are related with the norms of their caste. They are depicted as temptresses, the text suggests that the brahmin men cannot escape their lure. In another perspective it can be suggested that the lower-caste women are treated merely as sex objects. Within the framework of Indian caste system, feminine problems cannot be comprehensively represented. It is sometimes perceived that the freedom of movement traditionally extended to the lower caste women is synonymous with autonomous self-hood. Such generalization ignores the socio-cultural realities because such women cannot choose to be otherwise. Their relatively free movements and compulsions of physical labour do not liberate them; they only indicate their economic, class and gender oppression. The absence of sexual taboos in their life does not constitute a choice, it only facilitates their exploitation by the upper caste male. In *Samskara* too, the socio-economic reasons of their victimization are glossed over and the brahmin men’s transgression to satisfy their casual carnal desires are accepted as norms. *Samskara* repeatedly refers to the folklore: ancestors cohabiting with Dravidian women, the legend of the matsyagandha, people visiting the brothels of Basrur in South Kanara, the story of the Shakuntalam. Returning from Shrinalli, Shripati pleasantly anticipates his rendezvous with Belli (37). Naranappa mockingly tells Praneshacharya, “who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure – except of course some barren Brahmins.” (21) Praneshacharya longingly hankers for Chandri’s presence, “He had not so far desired any of the beauty he’d read about in the classics Now he wanted for himself a share of all that,” (77) Such descriptions augment that fact that gendered identities are a consequence of one’s initiation into a particular culture, and its mores of defining social relationships.

Samskara introduces various female characters to us. However, the only woman character which has been developed fully is that of Chandri. She can be termed as a round character. W.E.M. Forster has remarked that the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising the readers in a convincing way. A round character must have the

incalculability of life within the pages of a book. Chandri possesses the profundities and complexities of the human mind, and develops with changing circumstances. Her portrayal also indicates her readiness for an “extended life.”

Chandri is introduced to us right in the beginning of the novel as Naranappa’s concubine (2) and a lowborn prostitute (5). Praneshacharya is aware that he would be polluted after talking to her. She is shunned by the Brahmins of the agrahara, even though Naranappa always treated her with a sense of equality, even eating the food cooking by her (6). Chandri does not possess any cultural talent. Rather, she has ungrudgingly accepted her secondary social status and learnt to act accordingly. When she goes to Praneshacharya to inform him about Naranappa’s death, she stands meekly in the yard (2). She also requests Naranappa not to eat food cooked by her (45). While the Brahmins gather to discuss the matter of Naranappa’s rites, she remains on the periphery, sitting against a pillar (7). Her spontaneous decision to offer her gold for the expenses of the rites startles everyone. “Suddenly Chandri did something that stunned the Brahmins. She moved forward to stand in the front courtyard . . . Loosened her four-strand gold chain, her thick bracelet, her bangles, and placed them all in a heap before Praneshacharya. She mumbled something about all this jewellery being there for the expenses of the rite, and went back to stand in her place.” (9-10)

Chandri’s sensitivity can be discerned in her concern for Naranappa’s last rites. She is afraid that if he is not cremated properly, he may turn into an evil spirit. She is determined not to let it happen, “She’d eaten his salt, she, Chandri.” (45-46) Sitting on the verandah, waiting for Praneshacharya’s decision, she even tries to push her drowsiness away (46). Shripati recalls her devotion to Naranappa with enthusiasm, “in a hundred mile radius is there any woman as lovely, as bright, as good, as Chandri? . . . What does it matter if she’s a whore? . . . Didn’t she behave better than any wife with naranappa . . . Which brahmin woman would do so much? Stupid shaven widows!” (72)

Chandri also possesses an acute practical sharpness. Unable to leave Naranappa’s body rotting in his house, she tries to arrange his cremation. When Sheshappa indicates his inability to meddle with a brahmin corpse, she seeks the help of a Muslim acquaintance. Without bothering for religious rituals, she carries the corpse to the cremation ground and burns it, as she feels that it was only a carcass, a “stinking, rotten carcass,” neither Brahmin, nor Shudra (70). She is also unwilling to create any complexities in Praneshacharya’s life, and leaves the agrahara clandestinely. Her self-image is “matrilineal and she displays strong affections for her mother. She desires a child by Praneshacharya as he had looks and also virtue. She is “a natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self-reproach.” (68) She does not want to publicize what had brought a sense of “worthwhile ness” to her. (68) Suppressing her desire to meet the Acharya again, she quietly moves away, taking her jewellery and saris with her.

The unembellished surrender to passion which Praneshacharya had acknowledged in the presence of Chandri, is experienced by him again when Putta introduces him to Padmavati, a half-caste Malera woman living alone in a grove. This encounter is fraught with sexual

implication, and parallels the earlier one with Chandri in the forest. She is presented as another “prostitute figure who tempts the ascetic Brahmin, stirring in him fires of passion. Pranesacharya is mesmerized and transfixed, “Elongated dark eyes. A black snake braid coming down her shoulder, over her breast. The girl swaying at the end of the bamboo pole. Knives – wings – beaks – feathers. In the forest dark, the offering of full breasts. . . . The bird is paralyzed by the stare of the black serpent He turned around A stirring of fire in his chest. His eyes looked on, fiery. (123)

Women of *Samskara* are stereotypical and non-autonomous characters who have internalized and adjusted to the patriarchal mores. Gendered constraints are corroborated and buttressed by the rigidity of the caste system, which further circumscribes the practicability of self-hood. The novel evocatively suggests how the social practices encourage a blinkered vision among men, which makes them insensitive to the individuality of women. Traditional chauvinistic values incite men to relate to women either within the pre-defined social roles or to treat them merely as sex objects. It shall be pertinent to refer to Virginia Woolf’s path-breaking essay, “Men and Women,” in which she has raised certain questions which are relevant in different backgrounds even today, though often get treated as clichés. Woolf has remarked that literature is not only a soliloquy of the garrulous male, it also often represents what men desire in women, and not what women essentially are. Similarly, sensitive readers can and do imagine what is not there, as what is not there also has a presence, it also has a tendency to creep in clandestinely and take over somehow highlighting the significance of what is not said, what has been deliberately marginalized to cloud vision. *Samskara* bears a testimony to it.

20.5 Let Us Sum Up

Samskara presents a vivid picture of a society which has accepted caste discrimination as a norm. It has unquestioningly accepted the brahmin eminence, and pushed the lower-caste people to a periphery. Brahmins are supposed to be the spiritual and temporal guides, teachers and exponents of law, whereas the shudras perform menial services only. They are routinely denied even the semblance of quality. Their hutments are quite a distance away from the brahmin agrahara (39). The abject poverty of their life is also discernible. They depend on manual labour for their livelihood. Chinni and Belli pick up the cow dung. They are treated with indifference. Chinni begs for something to eat, standing at a distance from a brahmin woman, “Please, avva, throw a morsel for my mouth, avva.” (58) Betel leaf, betel nut and tobacco are thrown at her from some distance. Such incidents highlight the extent of untouchability practiced in the contemporary South Indian society. Thus we see that the caste emerges as an independent character in *Samskara*. It informs the action, moulds the characters’ responses and also provides the much-needed sociological background.

20.6 Review Questions

1. Write a detailed note on the thematic analysis of the novel, *Samskara*.

2. Justify the title of the novel *Samskara*.
3. *Samskara* is an expression of social pressures and individual consciousness. Discuss.
4. *Samskara* is an expression of inner conscience. In the light of this statement sketch the character of Praneshacharya.
5. Write a critical note on caste as character in the novel *Samskara*.
6. Discuss Anantha Murthy as Novelist with special reference to the novel *Samskara*.
7. Write a note on the art of characterization of Anantha Murthy with special reference to the novel *Samskara*.

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UNIT-21

INDIRA GOSWAMI : *AN UNFINISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Biographical Sketch
- 21.3 Her Major works
- 21.4 Introduction to the Text : *An Unfinished Autobiography*
 - 21.4.1 Critical Assessment of Text
- 21.5 Autobiographical genre
- 21.6 Self -Translation and Normal Translation
- 21.7 Lets Sum Up
- 21.8 Review Questions
- 21.9 Bibliography

21.0 Objectives

The present unit aims to engage you in an indepth study of translated Assamese version of *An Unfinished Autobiography*. It would indeed be an exciting journey of uncanny honesty with which the writer Indira Goswami unfolds her life from her childhood to an age where her stories novels and poems converge into oneness.

The unit deals with

- i) A well-known Assamese writer Indira Goswami
- ii) Her truly memorable autobiographical work.

21.1 Introduction

Indira Goswami, who writes under the pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami, is a writer in Assamese who has for long been celebrated for producing long and short fiction of the highest quality, and a truly memorable autobiographical work. The available English translation of her works has made her reach to wider audience being born in a traditional Vaishnavite family of Assam, her stories unfold her experiences, her feeling of longing and loss and capture

the differences to the social mores.

Her life according to all her major works began on a dramatic note. It is one of courage and conviction above all and much of her writing echoes these strengths and sentiments. The varieties of violence, all avoidable, that humanity inflicts on itself, whether as group or individual, the pain and the misery they create, the protection and love which they are either unwilling or unable to provide but which they desperately crave-these are some of the themes that run through Indira Goswami's works. Her graphic depiction of violence and her use of startlingly fresh images are aspects that make her works unique not only in Assamese but in all Indian literature.

21.2 Biographical Sketch

Indira Goswami, born in 1942, in a high class Vaishnavite family of Assam owned a *satra* (monastery) and the huge adjoining estate. The *satradhikar* (heads) were held in high esteem by their disciples as they were their moral and spiritual mentors. As raised in one such *satra*, Indira was on a vantage point from where she would watch the result of unbridled power-unique social institution of Assam.

Indira Goswami started writing early, as a school-going girl, but her intense and persistent involvement with the art began when her husband died in an accident in 1967, after 18 months of her marriage. The pen presumably became her sword to cut a path through the enveloping *ghoom*. Her writings have the most striking feature-utter frankness and unmeasurable courage- which few can match- in laying bare intimate details of experiences.

She picked up sorrows of others and enmeshed them with her own to produce short stories at first. Her first major novel, *The Stream Of Chenab*, published in 1972, set her firmly as a novelist while pursuing her research in Vrindaban (she saw the plight, exploitation and miserable lives of the Brahmin widows) on comparative study of Goswami Tulsi Das *Ramcharitmanas* and Mashava Kandale's Assamese *Ramayana* and in her novel *The Blue Necked Braja*. The book had a tumultuous reception in Assam and Indira Goswami instantly became a controversial name in Vrindaban.

Her novel, '*The Rusted Sword*' published in 1980, was also in Assamese dealing with worker's exploitation by the management. Indira Goswami has received many literary prizes including the Sahitya Acedamy Award in 1982 for her novel '*The Rusted Sword*' and Gyanpith Award in 2000, the Indian equivalent of the Nobel Prize in literature for her. In 1988, *The Worm Eaten Saddle of Tusker* earned her the Assam Sahitya Sabha Award. This novel primarily deals with the socio economic conditions of *Sattra* in the South Kamrup district of Assam. Among her other major novels are *Ahiron* (1978) and *Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha* (1994) which is written with reference to the Delhi riots that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984.

Indira's anthologies of short stories include '*Chinaki Marom* (1962), *Kaine* (1966)

and *Hriday Ek Nadir Nam* (1990) which suggests that her direct experience of social reality are woven closely into her stories.

Her books of poetry '*Pain and Flesh*', '*The Man from Chinnamasta*' and '*Melodies and Guns*', written in English, are important landmark in her career. She herself in the author's note mentions, "I am not a poet. I am a novelist and a short story writer. These poems were written in my leisure. My poetry is more like footnotes to my fictional writings."

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is a celebrated name in the Assamese literary world. Goswami is known for her bold spirit. She is the second Assamese recipient of the Jnanpith Award, the highest literary award in India in the year 2000. Her short stories and novels set in different locales of India, give her readers a taste of life beyond the boundaries of Assam. When talking on the tough social issues of urban life, the harsh lives of labourers, and the plight of widows in Vrindaban and Assam, Goswami displays great empathy and compassion. She has an ear for the vernacular and is able to reproduce the coarse conversations of her protagonists. Her way of expressing anger or indignation at forced rituals and oppressive social customs is very subtle and guarded. Throughout her writings, she exudes confidence, courage and determination.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami, also known as Indira Goswami, has composed many short stories (*Sinaki Moram*, *Koina*, *Hridoi Ek Nadir Naam* etc), novels (*Chenabar Srot*, *Nilakantha Braja*, *Ahira*, *Mamore Dhara Tarowal*, *Datal Hatir Uwe Khuwa Howdah*, *Jakhmi Jatri*, *Chinnamastar Manuhto*, etc), a biography (*Mahiyashi Kamala*) and her works have been translated into many Indian languages as well as into English. Mamoni Raisom Goswami has received many awards for her literary contributions.

The locales of most of Goswami's writings are outside Assam e.g. *Chenabar Srot* is set in Jammu and Kashmir, *The Blue Necked Braja* in Uttar Pradesh, *Ahira* in Madhya Pradesh, *The Rusted Sword (Mamore Dhara Tarowal)* in Uttar Pradesh, *Pages Stained With Blood* (Tez Aru Dhulire Dhusharita Prishta) in Delhi, etc. Only a few of her writings are based in Assam. In this regard, we can mention, *The Moth Eaten Howdah Of A Tusker* (Datal Hatir Uwe Khuwa Howdah). The setting of *The Moth Eaten...* is a Satra in the South Kamrup District of Assam. The plot revolves round the lives of three Brahmin widows in the family of the Satradhikar. *Datal Hatir Uwe Khuwa Howdah* vividly brings out the superstitions, the abuse of power and oppression that widows had to confront. The theme is the socio-economic decadence of the feudal institution lingering on till the modern times on the threshold of the independence of India and the repression of widows in the orthodox Brahmin society. The novel also depicts the lives of other common folk.

Even though writing in Assamese, Indira has won recognition on an all India level. She also enjoys the status of a scholar. Her research work on the Ramayana has been published under the title '*Ramayana from Ganga to Brahmeputra*'. At present, she is associated with the delhi university as Head of the Department of Modern Indian Language and literary studies.

21.3 Her Major works

The Stream of Chenab (1972)

A novel, that launched Goswami as a novelist painted a new setting and some extremely unusual characters for the Asamese readers in the year 1972. The background is a construction site for a bridge on the river Chenab in Kashmir and the plot of the novel revolves around the women who worked for the construction company under which the work was done.

The Shadow of Dark God and Sin (Neela Kanthi Braja,1976)

The background to the novel is Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh and the plot revolves around the plight, the exploitation and miserable life of Brahmin widows who spend their remaining years in the holy city of Vrindavan for peace, solace and the “Grand Exit” from world. The author, who spent some time in Vrindavan and was herself a widow, writes everything that does not guarantee the wishes of these widows, the Raddheshaymi’s, as they are known as. She was the first one to raise a voice against the exploitation of this class of people in India through her writings. Till then, Vrindavan was a “Holy City”, where widows go to spend the last days peacefully and reach the abode of God. Aptly titled, The Blue-necked Braja, alluding to the myth when Lord Shiva’s neck became blue in pain when he drank the poison that was churned out from the sea during the process of making the immortal nectar by the Gods which would have otherwise destroyed the whole universe.

The Rusted Sword (1980)

Another masterpiece, where the writer once again raises the voice against the injustices done to the workers of a construction company. But more than a mere propaganda for demanding equal rights it depicts the stories of the exploited workers of the company sensitively, their labour union and a labour strike organized by them which ultimately fails because of some corrupt leaders and manipulation by the company management. The construction site of the aqueduct, on the bank of river Sai in Uttar Pradesh, under a private company was another new wave in the field of Assamese literature. The Novel won her the Sahitya Akademi Award.

The Moth Eaten Hodah of A Tusker

Perhaps this is the best literary work of the author. Set in the South Kamrup district of Assam, in the Aamranga Sattrā (Vaisnavite institutions), it doesn’t only narrate the plight of the three widows but also the decadent feudalistic order of the Sattrā, pulled in different directions where the main male protagonist Indranath becomes the epitome of this tug of war between modernity and tradition on the threshold of the independence of India. The feature film based on this novel by Santana Bordoloi won several national and international awards.

Pages Stained With Blood

Enormously powerful, this novel is based on the political violence perpetrated among the Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in Delhi. But that is not only the novel talks

about-the real Delhi from the Roshanara Bagh, Ballimaran, Gantaghar and Mirza Ghalib's jilted house is evocatively captured and serves as the first half of the novel. Her earlier works had sensitive portrayal of the plights of the backward classes but the pages here are not only soaked with blood depicting the state of the minorities but the narrators emotional intercourse with them is also one pre-dominant theme in the novel. The ricksha-puller Santokh Singh, the kabariwala Balbir, etc from the lower class gain a lot of space leading to a sense of intense emotional attachment with the unnamed narrator. History is an important theme, but it's not only present as a political theme but it's the history of common people, people from lower class.

21.4 Introduction to the Text : *An Unfinished Autobiography*

Indira writes in a manner which suggests that her direct experiences of social reality are woven closely into the narrative. This gives her works a touch of authenticity, even though it carries its hazards for a woman writing in an Indian language. Whenever an intimate experience is portrayed, there is a natural assumption on the part of the reader that it reflects the writer's personal experience - an inference which neglects the creative process that transforms lived experiences into literature.

Being a young and beautiful widow, Indira had to withstand much unwanted attention - the bitter story is narrated in her autobiography. Her life in Vrindavan during early widowhood is also recorded with great poignancy. Indira had, after becoming a widow, taken a school-teacher's job in *Golpara* in Assam. But she simply could not stay there, and decided to proceed to Vrindavan to pursue her research on *the Ramayana*.

21.4.1 Critical Assessment of Text

She begins part one with the narration of the time she could remember, a time she could feel, a time she was happy. But she tells us that she was destined not to have a mind that remained at ease. A sort of "vague fear and anguish" somehow seem to have settled on her heart even at that tender age.

Describing the surrounding of their home, she inform us about the strange odour coming from the room of a neighbour, Mrs James and that very odour still haunts her. At a very little age of ten she started suffering from her own created fear of her father's death whom she did not want to lose at any cost. Her fear comes true and her father died of cancer and since then a feeling of self - destruction got rooted firmly in her heart and the worst part of it was that she become speechless and expressionless about her tormenting state. Though her mother was more gracious than her father yet to her father was more adorable. She got a sense of security in his company. A clear contrast is witnessed between her and her school-mates' dresses and possessions while she discusses her school - days. She never celebrated her birthday, though she used to attend birthday parties of her European friends, as her father wanted his children to follow "the simple living and high thinking" principle. As a whole, we can say adversity of

privileges was her permanent companion during her childhood. But the above-mentioned adversity was not so big a problem for her as was her mental state full of fear, anguish and self - destruction. She could not overcome these thorns pricking her heart and making blood ooze out from it. She says: “The desperation and suicidal tendencies of the Shillong days seemed to have secured a foothold in my heart”. And “I was stricken with grief to think of the terrible effect of separation from my near and dear ones. I did not know what exactly it was. It was a shot of strange unease of my inner mind which I tried to subdue but failed”.

The beautiful lush green landscape of Shillong deeply impressed her mind. Her attachment to her teachers is evident in her description of her teachers. Her stern headmistress’s strict and merciless attitude filled her heart with more fear. We notice her religious bent of mind when she talks about her favourite subject painting and the pictures of Christ drawn by her. She relates the thorns of fear and anguish pricking her heart with the nails hammered into the body of Christ at the time of crucifixion. During her visit to a church - fair, she says : “A gaily decorated picture of Jesus was displayed in the fair. What had first drawn my attention to it were the blotches caused by the hammering of nails into his body. The crown of thorns, too, pricked my heart”. And “I feel moved to the depths of my being when I see a picture of Jesus on the cross”.

And towards the end of her stay at Shillong she started growing as a woman losing her girlhood. Remembering the goggling eyes of the people she says: “At the age of twelve, my breasts had grown so that I was terribly embarrassed, when my father saw me, taking a bath naked in the bathroom”. “Every moment of my life reflects my past, my body, my relations with others, the tasks I have undertaken and independent, these realities sometime reinforce each other and descant together sometimes they interfere with, contradict and neutralize each other ... A life is such a strange object, at one moment translucent, at another utterly opaque, an object I make with my own hands, an object imposed on me, an object for which the world provides the raw material and then steals it from me again, pulverized by events, scattered, broken, scored yet retaining its unity ...”.

Since her early childhood she was fond of films and she liked ‘Samson and Delilah’ and the brutality of the royal soldiers was deeply imprinted on her mind. “That incredible depiction of man’s worst outrage against man was deeply engraved upon my mind. Such early impressions are said to be ineradicable”. She had heard about the soldiers snatching and dividing the profession of Jesus at the time of Crucifixion and that very thing was to happen in her own life later as she remarks, “It was in my scripture classes that for the first time I came across an account of people removing clothes from a dead body. Many years later, I myself witnessed how a watch and a gold ring were snatched from the corpse of my own beloved”.

Leaving Shillong after her father’s retirement was a painful experience for her family. She, now, remembers the bygone years and the losses borne by her calmly which was, in fact, a matter of surprise for her, she remarks : “Many years have rolled by since then, and many events have taken place to which I have been a witness. Father passed away - and my mind

which since childhood smarted under the constant fear that I would not be able to bear his loss, bore it calmly”. Commenting on the loss of the near and dear ones, she says, “Layers of the heart have come off, one after another, like the concentric peels of an onion. A myriad new faces have come into view and myriad new relationships have been formed, but the old, unseen companions of thought abide in my mind unchanged”.

The unknown fear and anguish kept following her and at an hour when man is eager to follow the course of new ray of light, her mind seemed busy counting the number of graves in the graveyard. At that time she thought of becoming a writer. A number of good marriage offers for her had come when her father was alive, but after his death, no such offers came and although her mother was trying to find out a suitable partner for her, she was facing the infliction of two old prosecutors of her soul-agony and despair. And then she failed in her examination. Her mental status was thus : “In those days of silent suffering, I was once rudely shocked by the result of an examination in which I had appeared”, though she was not attached to the bookish knowledge and the system of examination : “To be frank, I attached the least importance to the system of examination. I never felt inspired by the books prescribed for my school and collage courses. Those that would stimulate my mind and soul were not included in any syllabus”, her suffering was deep.

And then, in 1961, she attempted suicide but was saved and a well-wisher warned her not to attempt that crime again taking into account the respect and dignity of her forefathers. His comments about her family’s respect dignity reminded her of her family values. We can see how closely Indira Goswami’s autobiography resembles what Simone de Beauviour had to say about herself in her third volume Force of Circumstance. As in Beauviour’s autobiography, Goswami’s narration of the self is rich in tensions that pervade one’s life in making. We can see that on the one hand, present here seems an organic outgrowth of the past, but seen in another way her temporal realities appear independent and this is why Goswami’s autobiography is ‘unfinished’. Also we can see that she is both free and not free to make and remake herself. The self, then, is the bearer of a contingency that characterizes the world in general.

After being saved from her attempt of suicide she had now to bear the harsh comments from the outside world alleging her of attempting suicide out of some guilt of social and moral wrong. Her mind needed an escape from the mortal world in search of real peace. As she remarks : “I think much consideration of caste or respectability. Nor did I think much of the social status of my family. My mind was eager only for an escape-any escape - from the terrible moment which flayed me day and night”. And after that attempt of suicide, “physically, I became a little worn out and lost some of my glamour after that attempt at suicide. Besides, to face the world outside become a problem for me. I hardly dared to go out for fear of the spate of uncharitable remarks passed on me by a passerby. Some of the remarks were quite vulgar and too cruel to be forgotten. I still seem to bleed when I remember them, for they pick me like spikes even on this distant days”, she discloses.

The life she was living wasn’t here any more, she no longer thought she could maneuver

it the way she wanted, she felt like an impotent onlooker watching the play of alien forces: history, time and death. The inevitability did not even leave her the consolation of tears - she had exhausted all her capacities for revolt, for regret. Goswami feels that the society was hostile, that it had banished her from the future, stripped fibre by fibre of her past. Yet with as immense strength of will she reconstituted her being and tried to emerge out of her disillusionment. She tries to set her life within a given space of time and let it evolve in her given place. She also admits having lovers but she had not been to bed with anyone and no one was ready to marry her for the blot of suicide upon her forehead. She says, "someone seemed to whisper in my ears : "who do you think would be prepared to marry you ? They know you for a girl who attempted suicide. Do you think much of the host of your lovers ? How far do you expect them to carry you along the path of life ? Don't you shudder to think that this life would leave you quite helpless and at the mercy of an indifferent world after extorting all the precious bits from you ?" She remained unmarried for a long time and it was a matter of utter frustration for her lonely, helpless and widowed mother. And adding fuel to the fire of her misfortune, the astrologers too read very bad days for her to follow in her further life. We witness extremity of her cruel fate as read by a pundit who said to her mother," better to cut her into two and set her afloat in the river than give her in marriage". Among those miserable days of her life, she started taking interest in literature and she looked upon it as a drop of nectar that would soothe all her woes.

Then came the first turning point of her life in April 1962 when she met Madhawan Roysom Lyenger (Madhu), her would-be husband and engineer from Mysore who came to Guwahati to work in construction company. During a picnic, Madhu came near her and started talking about her attractive personality. He asked her about her aim of life but she could not answer as she remarks. "I only knew how to dig the graveyard in my thoughts". Meanwhile she was writing short stories which were about the lonely and the lost. Serving as a teacher in a missionary school, she sometimes thought about becoming a nun and hence escape from the material world. In April 1963, her mother turned down Madhu's marriage proposal for her as he came from the south, so utterly despaired she married one of her lovers in the court and returned home promising him to come back to him but after returning home her unstable mind was filled with shame and repentance. Infact, earlier, she had imagined physical love with Madhu so marrying one man and having love and sympathy with another was a state of dire dilemma and she suffered a lot mentally. "Woe is me! Has anyone else suffered like me ? The marriage was contracted with one man, but love and sympathy were felt for another ! What a dire dilemma" Finally, she decided not to go to her husband in-papers. But her husband dragged her into the court and the whole matter was public. She could not define the unpleasant state of mind of everyone in the family including herself. She somehow got divorce from that man and again she was plunged into a well of dark depression.

After her post graduation she was married to Madhu in October 1965. She came to Gujarat with Madhu where he was serving. That change of place proved to be a boon for her.

She forgot all the miseries, wishes to die, agony and shame in Madhu's company. Each new day was a glory, a revelation. For the first time she came across the power of love to change one's life. She describes the beautiful landscape of Gujarat which she together with Madhu enjoyed. She also came across the lives of the workers on work - sites. And then Indo - Pak war broke out and she also worried about Madhu as the Pak soldiers wanted to blow up the bridge, under construction, which was being built by Madhu. But soon, the period of war - fear was ended with the end of war. And then Madhu was transferred to Kashmir and they had to settle there.

At this point she started being sucked into a web of apprehensions, fearful of the approaching misfortune in her life and that misfortune turned out to be Madhu's death in an accident. And in the hospital "Madhu was lying unconscious, in blood - besplattered clothes. There were big blotches of blood all over his head and breast", and she cried, "Madhu is dead!". She had lost everything pleasant in her life with his death.

After Madhu's death, she became a victim of restlessness and her mind grew restive. She took up a teacher's job in Sainik School Golpara. She became an object of sympathy for everyone and instead of carrying sweet - scented attar in her vanity case she started carrying sleeping draughts. Every evening she was agog with an expectation - "Perchance I would hear Madhu's voice", and "But I know that was an illusion. Nothing lingers of a man after death. Tear your hearts to shreds, Yet your beloved returns not to inquire why. Terrible indeed is this tale of the overnight separation of two being truly united once in the depths of their being. But there is no help". She depicts the state of mind of a young and lonely widow who can not be understood by anyone: "who can ascertain the exact state of the mind of a woman as suddenly hit by misfortune as I was? Who can determine how the abrupt end of a happy conjugal life affects the poor wife? Most of the time, as I realized, a sense of endless, ruthless pain suppressed all the yearnings of the flesh. I felt like being pushed into a deep, dark abyss". However, later she decided to face the life boldly and never cry for the pains of her life. But overwhelming sense of grief and misery and an uncertain future combined to disconcert her. She could not face the outdoors so she confined herself indoors: "I did not have the courage then to look up, literally, to the sky above my head" and "The sense of void that possessed my soul then, no words can describe". Greatly dejected with her life, she engaged herself in completing her half - done novels, meanwhile she met Amrita Pritam who advised her to write more and more and told her that writing could be a comforting device for the dejection as it expresses the hidden dejection of a man. And she completed her novel "*Chenabor Srot*" (The surge of Chenab). Once again it was self - 'a woman self' - that makes her feel her tragedy more grave, more potent - mysterious and untameable forces of time and circumstance were laying waste her body, hacking away threateningly, making her a total destruction.

Fed up with everyone's advice what to do and what not to do, she used to feel great deal of dissatisfaction by being treated as a helpless widow by the society. She, a strong protestor of age - old customs and beliefs related to the Hindu widows, remembers the words

of a Brahmin woman on the days of bereavement of her widow aunt. The words were thus : “Touch her not, no you not must not !Only recently she is windowed. She carries in her heart the pollution of sin”. As a young, lovely, helpless and beautiful widow she was an object of attraction for some of her male colleagues at school. But unaware of all such things she felt terribly confused with life and longed to escape. She would swallow sedatives and sleep-inducing pills but sleep was far away from her. She depicts her rough appearance thus : “my hair was unkempt, my clothes dishevelled. Added to that the deep smudge I got on my cheek just beneath the eye after Madhu’s death. My appearance must have been quite alarming at that moment”. She always remained under the sub - conscious influence of sleeping pills in order to get mental comfort. Though she tried hard to forget her pains by engaging in the school activities, “But as soon as I entered my room, I was steeped in darkness. Despair would sneak into my soul and bog me down”. She could not find any answer to the question how she was going to live without Madhu. Taking reading as a relaxing measure for her tormented mind she started reading books and her father’s diaries. During her Sainik School days her mind was always haunted with the past memories. She recalls her mind full of fear, during childhood, for killing of the goats on various occasions. She preferred reading her father’s diaries rather than the religious books. She does not know why she developed such an obsession with his diaries.

But the depression continued to eat into her heart and mind day by day. “At a time when I was so steeped in despondence that I could not look up at the sky. It was impossible for me to devote myself whole - heartedly to my school duties”. “Every morning I woke up to find my mind sagging under an acute pain of depression, so much so, that the old obsession of the suicide, which haunted me from my early childhood but left me whole after I had met Madhu, once more started nagging me in the secret recesses of my mind”. She used to carry her little notebook, in the vanity case, where she recorded many things, experiences of her life and mind. It was a precious possession for her. And apart from recording her experiences, riding a rickshaw to the market and collecting the ‘gardinal pills’ was her only work.

One of her colleagues Mr Singh tried hard to drag her out of depression. He, during an evening-walk with her, urged her to start a new life with him but she could not give him a positive reply. For the first time after Madhu’s death she had walked with an unknown man along a deserted path. And though “I had not really overcome the passions and desires of the flash. They were all alive within my body”, “In first lonely shaded path, he could have easily assaulted me, or I myself could have transgressed, consequent upon the tragic frustration brought upon an ideal conjugal life in the prime of youth” but “that day, I did not extend my hand to Mr. Singh. He, too, did not feel encouraged to repeat his question”. The sense of agony and despair always remained with her. Those days, the sky appeared to be as the skin of a deer and the stars looked like stabs on its skin caused by sharp spears. She says, “Has anyone else ever faced a situation like mine so that he can not look up at the sky overhead”.

Later on, when she visited foreign land, again the question of looking up to the sky

haunted her and she says, “No, No, No ! Everywhere my mind was equally depressed. No change of scene could bring me out of my depression”. She adds, “Day in and day out, I carried for long within me an indefiable load of grief with the result that my heart got hardened and become insensitive to delight and happiness of other people” and I could not abandon, my heart to joyous occasions. Even after the lapse of many years after the tragedy, my mind remained in such spiritual stupor”. Receiving praise from Dr. Kamala Ratnam, Amrita Pritam and Mr. Gulabdas over her short – stories she says, “Accustomed to receive adverse criticism on my life and letters, these words of sympathy and praise naturally moved me deeply”.

Leaving Sainik School for her research work in Vrindhvan she felt deeply moved and confused about her decision and future plan. She thought it was her curiosity to know Sri Ram and Lord Krishna that forced her to come to Vrindhvan. And it was only in Vrindavan that she discovered it a folly to search the image of Rama in every male. While going to resign from the school her mental status was thus : “That was the time when I was more in the company of dead than of the living. The affliction of the loss of my beloved was still vexing my soul”. Repeatedly presenting the inability to face the sky she wished if Madhu would be with her to help her in making the right decision about going or not going to Vrindavan and about resigning or not resigning from the teacher’s job. About her nervousness she says, “I was weary both in body and mind. After having gone out bag and baggage, I would have little enthusiasm left to return, were that necessary – so I told myself, and I tried to envisage my situation as another’s equally steeped in the mystery of doubt and indecision. I saw myself, as an interlocutor and asked myself again if I was really keen on leaving that place. Strange was my situation. I would go, yet go not”. And while she was talking to the Principal., she says, “It seemed to me that the mind blew over the bones and skeletons of the tomb”. She asked the Principal whether she could come again and join the job but he remained indifferent to her problems and declined her request. It hurt her heart. Surprisingly she met that principal again in Delhi and now he proposed to her to live with him but she refused.

And in August 1969, she left for Vrindavan to complete her research work ignoring the objections of her mother and family, traveling all alone in a first class compartment despite the fact that she was afraid of traveling. After reaching Mathura, she took a tonga to Vrindavan but she was filled with painful memories as Madhu had wanted to come to visit that holy place with her. Madhu’s memories were still the cause of grief and dejection rather than inspiration. As she says,” Oh !What a growing affliction that was ! That was not the time when this memory of Madhu could be a source of inspiration to me as it now is. That was more of an unbearable moment. It took me a long fifteen years to take it as a fountain of inner strength and a stimulus”. She says, “ A nameless agony and despair seemed to tear my heart into bits. I always carried with me that double burden day and night as a priceless treasure since Madhu’s death. But now I realized that it was becoming too terrible for me. I tried my utmost to hide my agony from the guru and his spouse”. Her guru and his wife made all possible efforts to make her feel comfortable but they had little knowledge of the storm tossing her heart. When she

entered the dirty, dark living room given to her by her guru she could not tolerate the hardship of living in that dark hole. She says, "I could not check my tears. My soul cried in agony : 'No, no, I simply can't live here. I shall quit this cursed hovel at the earliest'". Her guru was too happy at her arrival but she was not. She says, "Against that, I, on my part, almost waged a war with myself just to hide from them any suspicion of my frustration and indecision". The feeling of dirty, uncomfortable hovel made her mind more tormented as she says, "I felt like being inside a closed coffin". She started crying and decided to return home with her uncle whom she was going to call the next day. According to her, "words are too inadequate for me to express the anguish of my heart on the first night at Vrindavan". Next day, her guru took her to the university where she was to complete her research work. When she was being interviewed by Swamiji, the rector, she expressed her distrust about the present system of examination. She says , "I said, I had secured a second class. How could I tell Swamiji that I had the least faith in the prevalent system of examinations of our country ? I was not prepared to consider myself inferior to those few of my friends who got a first class". Though she had earlier, decided to leave Vrindavan yet, later, on, she changed her mind, "I do not believe in supernatural forces and happenings. But at that particular moment, my mind's reaction seemed to have been controlled by some divine powers", "how I changed my resolve to return to Guwahati remains even now a mystery to me". Describing how hard she led her life those days in pursuit of studies she says," In grueling hot days, I abandoned the luxury of a bed and slept on the bare floor. That was the only way of escape from terrible heat".

Though she spent much of her time in research work yet the memory of Madhu haunted her. She was also shocked to see the immorality in the city of God (Vrindavan). Even in Vrindavan her mind was full of despair and agony, "The sky that was visible to me from my dark cabin now looked strange. It was a variegated sky which was at times smoky, at others covered with red clouds. Strange to tell, but a thought often struck my mind that the smoky clouds were not exactly so, but fragment of the temples ruined by Sikander Lodi and Auruangzeb. And the dark cloudlet appeared to me a clots of raw blood streaming from the heart of the worshippers engaged in the regular divine service and flowing through the temple doors. . . The same sky sometimes appeared to me like the skin of a deer shot dead, and the red clouds resembled the streams of blood of the hunted animal. Strange ideas filled my mind in those days. Through the window I saw now and then the moon playing hide and seek among the clouds. It was hanging in the sky like a lump of meat hanging at the butcher's". To escape from that gloomy existence she started reading ceaselessly. In mornings after getting up she used to ask herself how long she would have to bear life in this manner. She says, "I asked myself the old question – how could I at all live like this ? What was there in store for me ? The memory of Madhu was like a severe mental and bodily pain. All my endeavour to get rid of proved futile. How could I help myself with such a mind ? Sometimes, at midnight unable to bear grief and pain, I came out of doors. On such occasions, I would find the vicinity of the temple all deserted. Darkness seemed to reign supreme in the hovels. The bricks of the wall, their plaster coatings worn off, looked like heaps of bones of dead animals And night sky over

my head ? I somehow had the impression that the night sky alone was responsible for ruining all my happiness and throwing me into a cemetery. I went to one dark room after another. This is how I roamed about at the dead of night, a forlorn soul, afraid to face life. Sometimes, I run upstairs leading to my teacher's room. Unable to bear the relentless agony of mind, I thought I could possibly get some peace and solace if I would lay prostrate at my preceptor's feet. But I did not dare do a thing like that. So I returned to my own dark hovel, smarting in grief and pain".

But her teacher came to know her mental state despite her desperate efforts to hide her situation from public. He took her to the Deboriya Sanyasi, a holy monk, so that she could get some mental relief. But there also she huddled herself up close to her teacher to escape the notice of the holy man because, as she says, "I believe that the face is the index of man's inner thought. I was afraid that His Holiness would point his accusing finger at me from his elevated dais and declare : "That girl is intent on suicide. You will discover poisonous pills in her handbag". She could not ask him anything about her life and on her return her heart was smarting in deep regret for not asking the holy man a single question about her future. According to her, the one question that was constantly agitating her mind was : "Shall I really fix a way out after all ? Would my constant remembering of Madhu, which caused anguish in my heart, ultimately become a mere memory for which my heart would not bleed ?" She didn't even consign the asthi (the last pieces of bone collected and preserved from the ashes of a cremated person) of Madhu. She put it in an old shirt of Madhu. She justifies the preservation of his asthi and says, "The moment I came in contact with Madhu's old shirt, I felt that his bones were integrated with mine . . . No., I won't abide by the Hindu rite of depositing the asthi in the holy waters. Wasn't it my only physical link with madhu ?" She also engaged herself in writing a novel *Nilkanthi Vraja*. The anguish and frustration of its heroine Saudamini largely reflected her own emotional state. Again she went to a Sanyasi Mauni Baba, who advised her to remarry in order to get rid of all miseries. But her problem was how to free her mind from tormenting thoughts, feelings and the painful memories of Madhu that had gripped her heart and soul. She depicts a strange encounter with a monk who asked her to spend with him a whole day naked in a dark room and she was fully embarrassed and came out of his abode quickly. Meanwhile, she was attracted towards the younger brother of her friend Munni who also studied with her in the institute. She does not forget to tell us about the mark of agony which started appearing upon her face. She says, "I looked at my image at the looking glass that was hanging from a hook fixed to a wooden post. I was greatly surprised to find that barring the thin line of a deep dark scar that slowly developed just beneath the socket of my eye, there was no perceptible decline of my personal charm. The scars, however, were to me proof enough of the effect of mental agony upon a person's physical well-being".

After a long-time, she developed a sort of attraction for some man that is Munni's brother. During her Mathura visit by tonga she had the opportunity to sit beside him and she could sense a kind of manly odour emanating from his person. According to her, ". . . I felt at certain moments as if a poem was almost welling up in my heart but the next moment it collapsed

like a building long out of repair. All the time I was sitting by this young man, my heart was busy, as it were, clearing the debris of the crumbled structure”. Once again, one late evening while returning home, she had the opportunity of sitting close to him, she says, “once again during the time I was sitting beside him, a new poem was emerging in my heart like a temple”.

“The day I felt only soul separating itself from my flesh and blood in which it was lodged. I was not perhaps my true self, but a pretender to the place that possessed this tabernacle of flesh and bones. The pretender is necessarily false. He could not have done anything better than incinerate this lodging. It can at best turn the body into a stinking corpse. Yet it so happens sometime that this pretender arrogates to its supremacy over one’s being. That day it must have spread its supremacy over one’s being. The day it must have spread its tentacles over me, for a brief while at least”. She got late that night and Munni told her brother to accompany her to her abode. She says, “It was a graveled road and we had a jerky ride. Often, the young man’s body brushed against mine. I had the feeling as if it was Madhu sitting by me”. And he was also attracted to her. When she reached her abode. She went to the roof rather than going in to her room to view the beauty of Brahmkund in the moonlight. She says, “I could not account for this impulse, was it because an instinct, long dormant, suddenly wanted to find an outlet ? Or was it for some other reason ? . . . It was almost midnight. I was slowly making my way to the roof. I saw the young man also closely following me”. She says, “The young man, my lover, was standing by my side. That was the moment when I could surrender my whole being to him, a natural human desire which was suppressed by fate and circumstances since Madhu’s death but I could once more indulge myself in it. There stood the charming young man, enamoured of me, looking intently at my attractive figure. At the slightest indication from me, he would instantly take me in his arms, and shower my whole body with hot kisses. It was a tense moment. Time stood still.”.

But somehow she controlled herself and came downstairs. She says, “Thanks to a rare sense of self-confidence that I had suddenly acquired, I did not surrender myself to him”. And thereafter they never met again.

Describing worse condition of widows in Vrindavan she tell us that despite being exploited by everyone in every possible ways those widows never tried to escape from the reality of the lives whereas she wanted only to escape rather than face the reality. She says, “Notwithstanding this realization, the desperation of my mind did not abate. I still thought of collecting those pills as a means of escape. I suffered from an acute self-conflict”.

It was in Vrindavan where her colleague in Sainik School, Gurcharan visited her as he wanted to marry her but she at once told him to leave the place as she was afraid of her guru’s reaction. She felt deeply sorry for him but she was helpless. On the basis of her research work and knowledge of the lives of great and wealthy persons she came to a conclusion that all wealth and fame ultimately came to nothing. She also clarifies why she call Virindavan “the City of God”, because the city had been destroyed again and again by the Muslim invaders but each time it rose from its ruins. A city built with hand can be wiped out but not the city of God.

Once a snake crawls in to her room, in the beginning she was afraid of being bitten by the snake but, later on, she said to herself, “What was the harm if I died of snake bite ? Had I not been wishing for it, day in and day out ? What else did it mean to collect sleeping pills from the Sindhi doctor ? This thought brought me a sort of peace to my mind and sleep to my weary eyes”.

She had to face a stunning embarrassment before her teacher when she opened a packet given by a familiar elder businessman who visited her and told her that the packet contained Prasad. There was a rose – red sari in that packet instead of Prasad. Here we can witness an important change in her nature when she says, “It was because of the death wish deeply entrenched in my heart that I slowly grew immune to fears and anxieties of all kinds. I had to wage a long war, as it were, to overcome this obsession”.

Whenever her guru recounted his experiences of life she felt she was passing through a second childhood. Her guru was a father, a mother, brother and a friend for her.

He used to guide her at every step. In the company of her guru she felt as if she had wrapped herself again in the long – lost protective warmth of father. But despite all this, the number of sleeping draughts kept increasing day by day. And after not being successful to hide her misery she revealed her heart to her teacher and requested him to show some way out. She said to her teacher, “Sir, you must be quite aware that ever since my childhood I have been suffering from a strange sense of despondency. I was free from it for a brief while after my marriage with Madhu. I could then overcome this obsession with my self and would partake of other people’s joys and sorrows. I even thought of taking up some work for the good of the lowly, the lost and the neglected. But once again, I am in the grip of my old depression. I don’t know how to escape from it. Could you, Sir, show me some way out ?” Advising her to remarry her teacher gave her a charm-containing amulet and told her to recite that charm a hundred times daily in order to get some comfort. She thought over the whole matter seriously and remembered Mr Kaikos Burjor, the engineer-in-chief of a construction company, who helped her a lot in her adverse circumstances. During a visit to Delhi for some work, she spent one night with him in a hotel and returned to Vrindavan. Her reaction over that night spent with Kaikos was thus : “A sense of mortification numbed my soul”. She explains her internal state and says, “Without knowing my mind, I had spent a night with Kaikos Burjor. That modification would be so acute I did not realize earlier. I tried to console myself that I had not disgraced my self but that act” and “on the contrary, It was a time of self - assessment. Self – assessment in relation to a man who offered himself at your door ? Didn’t my teacher encourage me to be ready for such a situation ? Then why this sense of self reproach ?”. Even after her return to Vrindavan she could not wipe out the embarrassment of that night spent with Kaikos. She says. “I did not get much sleep at night. In my wakeful moments, I had the wish that the snake lurking in some dark recess of the temple would come out and bite me. Once I got up to check the number of sleeping pills in my vanity bag. There were quite a few. More than sufficient to put and an end to one’s life”, I began to despise myself so much so that for having spent that

night in the New Delhi hotel I did not even want to touch the clothes I had then put on, and laid them aside”.

And then a striking change occurred in her life when she visited the Rangaji temple with her teacher and his wife. “The three of us stood in a line in front of the image of Lord Tirupati. What appeared to be indeed every surprising and at the same time happily reassuring to me was that for the first time I could raise up my head and look straight at the very bright pair of the divine eyes. My stay overnight at a New Delhi hotel made me suffer not from a sense of shame but only a sense of humiliation”. She also came across a prostitute who used to visit her to make her draft letters for her to be posted to her male friend. That prostitute told her about one night spent with two males in a train in a vulgar manner. Indira asked her, “Don’t you think it humiliating to surrender your body to a man whom you neither love nor have known for long?” In reply she gave her an enigmatic smile which astounded her.

Describing her teacher’s caring attitude towards her she says, “I had the impression that my teacher had gradually begun to realize the sharpness of my heart’s agony. At that time he appeared to me to be my protective sprite, zealously watching over his charge. I felt I gained a unique power under his sheltering care . . . He showed the concern of a mother whenever I felt ill at ease. If I complained of giddiness, he would come down to my hovel rub balm on my forehead for my relief. Sometimes, torch in hand, he would be searching the crevices for the mysterious snake. On occasion like that, I felt that he was more than mother to me”.

Forcing her to apply for the post of lecturer in the University of Delhi, her mother said to her, “It’s pity you don’t realize your capacity”. But Indira did not even know what her mother had in her mind when she spoke of her capacity. Lack of confidence is evident when she refused to appear in the interview and said, “It’s no use my appearing at the interview, I would only be inviting embarrassment upon myself. For one thing, I’ve yet to complete my research here; for another, many bright boys and girls will appear in it. I don’t stand a chance!” (188) But her teacher ordered her to be ready to go to Delhi for that interview and he was going to accompany her. Before going to Delhi they went to Cowrie Baba for his blessings and while returning from Cowrie Baba she says, “But on that day, the sky above my head, on the bank of Yamuna at Chirharanghat, had a rare splendour. A soft, reddish glow, much like that of the radiant lips of a youthful girl, pervaded the sky” And “At the touch of the glory radiated by the sky at moment. All the ugliness and cruelty of the city of God seemed to evaporate instantly. I virtually fell into a deep contemplation on the grandeur of the sky and the transience of life and love”.

Even in Delhi before the interview, thoughts about Madhu’s memory and her indecisive views of marrying Kaikos haunted her mind but her teacher was regularly preparing her for the interview. But she could not control her emotions and started crying. On being comforted by her teacher she asked him, regarding her reunion with Madhu, “No one knows what happens

to a person after his death. It is all a mystery. Shall I ever meet him ? There seems to be no link left with him now”. And when every candidate was preparing for the interview she was wondering in the world of spirits in the company of Madhu. She says, “I was contending with my own mind, and after a great deal of effort, succeeded in jerking off my shoulders, temporarily through, the corpse of the past. For a few hours I was turning the page of some books including *The Origin and History of Assamese literature* by my former teacher, Satyendra Nath Sharma. All the while, however, the memory of my life in bygone days, burnt to a cinder, was lashing mercilessly at me”. In the interview she felt embarrassment while describing a bedroom scene, but her interview was good and a month later she got the appointment letter.

She also mentions her interaction with Tulsidas’ life and *The Ramcharita Manas*. In the end, she expresses her reverence as a tribute to her teacher and says, “It’s now many days since my most revered teacher Upender Chandra Lekharu breathed his last. I have preserved till today, the amulet that he fastened on my arm. I have not forgotten the incantation either that he had whispered in my ears. My teacher inspired me to be neither a famous writer nor an eminent scholar, but an individual endowed with all human qualities. Nothing measures up to humanity. For my teacher, humanity alone was the prime consideration and nothing else . . .”

21.5 Autobiographical Genre

Autobiography is considered to be, “the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression” and it fills in with the mode of self production through confession and this insists on the centrality of speaking of plan. Indira Goswami’s autobiography, at least in the first and the second part is steeped in painful incidents and in the third part it is so pressed forward as to heel the survivor of trauma. Indira Goswami seems to believe and we can agree, that pain can only be felt when it is articulated and also it is the paradox of this articulation that it simultaneously heals. Interweaving the life’s incidents in such a manner that they become metaphors of a traumatic experience is also part of the narration of an autobiography. And what is most important, is of course, what Foucault has to say, “One writer in order to become other than what one is”, suggesting that autobiography offers an opportunity for self-transformation through self - representation.

Every autobiography is the fragment of a theory, it is also an assembly of theories of the self and self - representation, of personal identity and one’s relation to family, region, a nation ... how to situate the self within these theories is the task of autobiography which entails the large organizational question of how rival milieus ought to be understood in relation to each other. Such heuristics as “man and society” or “text and context” reveal a pattern of pushing an individual forward out of a dense set of relation and a subsequent struggle to figure out where the individual come from. Thus an autobiography simultaneously contextualizes and decontextualises the writer and in the interface of the singular and shareable, emerges the real self. Indira Goswami seems to validate this concept and through the pages of *An Unfinished Autobiography* emerges a chiselled, finely wrought self.

An autobiography is both a documentary where scenes are strung together by a personal logic and it is also a fiction where their coherence is not of the rational order but is empowered by the writer's testimony. As a monument to personhood, an autobiography leaves behind a memorial, finished or unfinished to oneself and it is this memorial that performs the work of permanence that the person never can. Indira Goswami's autobiography also becomes a living, energized memoir that not only represents herself but seems to fit well for women at large.

The "I" as an enunciatory site is a point of conversions of the autobiographical politics and the politics of memory but we know that the speaking subject is a relational entity and is forgotten by the other. Ironically Indira Goswami's *An Unfinished Autobiography* was also written after a fateful attempt of suicide. As Amrita Pritam in her foreword to the autobiography says, life for Indira Goswami was no bargain and time and again she was hit hard by circumstances. These metamorphosed herself and gave us this stripling narrative of living pain and aftermath of trauma.

In the autobiographical piece, *Adha Lekha Dastabej* the most striking feature is its utter frankness and courage - which few can match - in laying bare intimate details of experience. The candour is especially remarkable for a woman publishing in Assamese, and that too in provincial - rather than a cosmopolitan - cultural environment.

As, Sidonie Smith notes, "the 'I' as an enunciatory site is a point of convergence of autobiographical politics and the politics of memory". Here, the speaking subject emerges in relation to the possibilities and limitations on its construction. Of these, memory is crucial because it, like experience, is both what one possesses by virtue of living and what can be constituted as evidence only by submitting it to various tests and protocols of presentation. As evidence, memory is only as authoritative as the person who is remembering, and only to the degree permitted in particular contexts. There is, then, a politics of memory in the sense that a political of persons and their actions is operating, as Foucault theorized, in a field of power. Here we also find self - representation informed by what Ian Hacking calls *memoro - politics*, which is "above all a politics of the secret, of the forgotten even that can be turned, if only by strange flashbacks, into something monumental." *Memoro - politics* concerns pathological forgetting, the kind that has produced psychoanalysis's clinical vocabulary of dissociation, repression, and amnesia, as distinct from the typically more benign kind, like forgetting the poetry you memorized in grade school or where you left your keys. Hacking's discussion of the controversies that characterize the study of memory suggest that current debates about "false memory" and recovered memory are a contemporary instance of a lengthy battle over truth telling and identity.

According to Hacking, trauma, which had always meant a physical or physiological wound, acquired a new meaning sometime between 1874 and 1886 in France when came to designste a spiritual, psychic or mental injury, what he calls a psychic or mental injury, what he calls a "wound to the sold" (4). Trauma acquired this additional sense of wounding by being

linked to memory, such that trauma's wound no longer injured only the body but the soul and, through it, memory itself.

Laura Brown in "*Not Outside the Range*" suggests that much of women's everyday life should properly be viewed as traumatic. Brown contends that women's habituation to abuse does not diminish its damaging and chronic effects. For those who define trauma as necessarily outside the range of daily life and who hold to unprecedentedness as the criterion of trauma, such a redefinition is problematic. It is worth taking a moment here to point out the double meaning of trauma in Freud. The relation between the wounds, and the extent of which trauma can be understood as repetition, raises an important question: where does harm done in the past end? The power of trauma to outlast the duration of its infliction is crucial to the senses of wounding that makes the term so resonant.

21.6 Self-Translation and Normal Translation

Translation process is an activity during which equivalences are established between a text, or segments of a text and another language. Since translation involves two different languages which sometimes have grown out of widely divergent social processes, the translator has to encounter problems that are diverse in nature. Languages are not only a collection of sounds; they are complex, the translator in order to render impact into other language, decides what gives literature 'impact' in its native language and then finds some analogous way to translate that into the intended language. Indeed much of a translation's outcome depends and values certain aspects of the original works and the work as a whole in its original language.

When the author himself or herself translates his/her own work we call it self-translation. For example Samuel Becket wrote first in French and then translated it into English by himself. Similarly Nabokov wrote both in English and Russian. He translated his works into English by changing them considerably. Thus most often the writer takes a great deal of liberty with the text and exercises his or her authorial right to revise it. There can be various reasons for it. Sometimes the author takes his work to be his property and feels that he or she can do anything with it. At other times, the writer goes through the process of creation once again when he/she sits down to translate and comes up with a new text. In a sense he/she re-writes the text.

The process of self-translation can be examined in two levels, "production" or "reception". As production, self-translation may be considered in its relationship to the original, to the language and to the author. By comparing the two versions of a text we can demonstrate how the same content is subtly changed by the exigencies of a different language. Sometimes readers accept self-translation as more authoritarian than those done by others despite the tendency of authors to translate more freely and revise.

A translated text always interprets and comments on the original text. Normal translation is a result of a two-stage process of reading-writing whereas self-translation is a reenactment of the act of writing which produced the original text. Normal translation is the reproduction of

a product while self-translation is the repetition of a process. The later is actually re-writing.

As Beajour states, “Because self-translation (and the frequently attendant reworking) makes a text retrospectively incomplete, both versions become avatars of a hypothetical total text in which the versions of both languages would rejoin each other and be reconciled.”

21.7 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit you have read about-

1. a well-known Assamese writer Indira Goswami.
2. her truly memorable autobiographical work.
3. the autobiographical genre of literary writing.
4. the self-translation and translation.

21.8 Review Questions

1. Write a note on the childhood years of Indira Goswami.
2. *An Unfinished Autobiography* is a true example of autobiographical genre. Elucidate.
3. Explain with reasons as to how did she fought to live within the society as a widow.
4. How can *An Unfinished Autobiography* be called a full text ?
5. What fear did the writer had in his growing years ?
6. What is the difference between self translation and translation ?
7. Who memories made her move ahead in life ?

21.9 Bibliography

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UNIT-22

MAHA SHWETA DEVI : *MOTHER OF 1084* (I)

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Mahashweta Devi and the Naxalite Movement
 - 22.2.1 Literary Career
 - 22.2.2 Mahashweta Devi as an Activist Writer
- 22.3 Introduction to the Text: *Mother of 1084*
 - 22.3.1 Explanation
- 22.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.5 Review Questions
- 22.6 Bibliography

22.0 Objectives

In this unit we propose to study one of the great contemporary literary figures Mahashweta Devi, her potent support to the cause of the underdogs and one of her most popular works *Mother of 1084*

22.1 Introduction

Mahashweta Devi has influenced the present literary scenario more than any other contemporary writer. She belongs to that creed of great literary figures, who leave behind a trail of fire as they write. Born on January 17, 1926 at Dacca to Manish Ghatak, a well known poet and Dharitri Devi, a writer and a social worker, she inherited her parents' literary sensibility and zeal for social work. Mahasweta Devi had her schooling in Dacca before her family moved to West Bengal after partition. She joined Vishwabharati University at Santiniketan and completed B.A. (Honours) in English in 1946. She received her Masters degree in English from Calcutta University.

Mahashweta Devi worked as an upper division clerk at postal audit office, a school teacher and a journalist, before becoming a full time writer. Her journalistic endeavour continues even today as the editor of a quarterly literary journal *Bortika*, meaning 'The Torch'. This journal is a pioneer effort "in alternative literature in Bengali", giving voice to marginal peasants, workers, labourers and other people who live on the periphery of society including the oppressed

tribal population. She has also contributed significantly to newspapers and journals such as *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Yojana*, *Bartman*, *Yogantar*, *Aajkal*, and *Dainik Basumati* among others.

Among the prestigious awards Mahasweta Devi has won are Sahitya Academy Award(1979), Padmashree Award(1986), Jnanpith Award(1996), Ramon Magasaysay Award(1996). She was also decorated with the second highest civilian award of the French government, *Officer Des Arts et Des Lettres*, in 2003 for her contribution in the field of arts and literature. The latest honour to come her way is the prestigious Padma Vibhushan (2006). Unassuming and humble that Mahasweta Devi is, she admits to having been “overwhelmed” by this award.

Throughout her life and career, Mahasweta Devi has been a vociferous champion of the oppressed and the poor, who live on the fringe of society. She strongly opposes exploitation of the dispossessed in all forms. Her works focus on the interminable suffering of the marginalized sections of society particularly within the agenda of feudalism in the villages of West Bengal and the corruption rampant in the cities. Exposing many facets of the exploitative agencies at work in the rural as well as the urban India, Mahasweta Devi’s writings foreground caste and class disparities in addition to bias against women. The women are doubly marginalized because of the cruel nexus between patriarchy and feudalism. According to Paramita Bannerjee the texts like *Breast Stories*, *Mother of 1084* and *Rudali* bear out that “gender and class cannot be viewed as polarities; that one’s discourse can be informed by class and be gendered. One political stance need not rule out the other.”

Mahasweta Devi’s women offer resistance as representatives of a larger struggle towards freedom from all types of subjugation. As she herself observes, “. . . it has to be stressed and re-stressed that the women’s fight is an indispensable part of a bigger fight.”

In Mahasweta Devi we have, perhaps, the most vocal champion of the cause of the tribal communities. She has worked for their welfare selflessly all her life. Particularly noteworthy is her contribution towards the uplift of the ‘denotified’ tribal and nomadic groups, who are branded as criminals and live as outcasts of society. A major part of Mahasweta Devi’s oeuvre focuses on the victimization of the tribes by the upper classes, the most significant aspect of which is the tradition of the bonded labour. She provides an authentic picture of the way the system has been allowed to flourish even in the independent India at the will of the feudal lords.

22.3 Mahasweta Devi and the Naxalite Movement

In many of Mahasweta Devi’s works, she refers to the collective resistance of the subaltern⁴ communities. The Naxalite movement, which is one of the most important expressions of this resistance, forms the backdrop of Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* and many other writings.

Initially the struggle of the Naxalites entailed an array of rural struggles against the feudal lords waged by the landless peasants. The movement takes its name from Naxalbari village in west Bengal, where a tribal, who had been given land by the courts under the tenancy law, was attacked by the local gangsters on May 25, 1967. The Naxalbari peasants rose up in rebellion against this. Attacking landlords, whom they held responsible for this act, they reclaimed their land. In the pre-independence period as well, the feudal lords and the British government had joined hands to exploit the subalterns, holding up their land and subjecting them to eternal ignominy of bonded labour. As a consequence of years of subjugation, the resistance of these oppressed people found outlet in insurgency against the powers that be. Soon their rebellion took a violent shape.

The state of Bengal had been the first victim of the British imperialism in India. The poor people of the state had suffered interminably at the hands of the imperial power. Between two to three million people had lost their lives during the Bengal famine of 1943. While the British government attributed the famine to poor crops, the truth was that the agricultural produce, particularly rice was sent to meet the requirement of the British in South East Asia. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen convincingly establishes that the Bengal famine was “easily preventable.” The division of the state at the time of the Independence created further disillusionment. The post-independence period brought with it hope and euphoria, which soon gave way to frustration and anger because of unemployment among the urban youth and rampant corruption in the Establishment. The youth were inevitably drawn to into the movement, which spread to the cities. The radical groups of young people, who disrupted their studies to join in the revolutionary warfare, adopted terror tactics against the individual “class enemies”. But this approach proved counter-productive and police committed atrocities on them. There were many human rights violations including detention without trial, police torture and fake encounters among other things. Though the movement was brutally suppressed, thousands of young men and women sacrificed their lives for the cause they held precious—to annihilate the bourgeoisie and wipe out corruption from the echelons of power. Mahasweta Devi was approached by these young people to be their voice

22.3.1 Literary Career

Mahasweta Devi’s literary career spans over five decades. Her first novel *Jhasir Rani (The Queen of Jhansi)* appeared in 1956 followed by *Nati* in 1957. In the 60s and 70s many of her serious novels were written, which included *Kavi Bandyoghoti Gayiner Jivan O Mrityu (The Life and Death of Poet Bandyoghoti Gayin)*. *Andhar Manik (Jewel of Darkness)* and *Hajar Churashir Ma (Mother of 1084)*.

In fact her literary oeuvre is enormous, comprising more than hundred publications. These also include *Breast Stories*, *Basai Tudu*, *Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants, and Rebels*, *Ek-Kori’s Dream*, *The Book of Hunter*, *Outcast*, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, *Rudali*, *In Other Worlds :Essays in Cultural Politics*, *Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of*

Mahasweta Devi among others. She has also adapted some of her stories into plays. Mahasweta Devi writes in Bengali. However, many of her works have been translated into other Indian languages including Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya and also in a tribal language 'Ho'. The English translations of her major works have brought her international acclaim. Some of her stories have been translated into Japanese, Italian and French as well.

Her major novels and novellas which have been translated into English include *The Queen of Jhansi*, *Mother of 1084*, *Titu Mir*, *Operation Bashai Tudu* and *Rudali*. Apart from these many collections of short stories such as *Bitter Soil*, *Breast Stories*, *Imaginary Maps*, *Old Women*, *Outcast*, *Till Death do us Part*, an anthology of plays adapted from her short stories entitled *Five Plays* and her activist writings *Dust on the Road* are available in English translation.

22.3.2 Mahasweta Devi as an Activist Writer

Mahasweta Devi's activism is apparent in the way she has waged a war against the social and political conditions of the present times that create a wedge between the upper and the lower strata of society, pushing the underdogs of society towards the margin. Perhaps no other contemporary writer has contributed towards the uplift of the marginalized and the exploited tribal communities as Mahasweta Devi has. Her commitment to the cause of these people is absolute. Acutely aware of the apathy of all political parties towards them, she says:

I find my people still groaning hunger, landlessness,
indebtedness and bonded labour . . . All the parties
have failed to keep their commitment to the common
people I do not see in my lifetime any reason to change
this conviction of mine. Hence I go on writing about
people.

Mahasweta Devi's social activism certainly goes beyond theories of any political philosophy. She resists being labelled in any way. Because of her radical ideas, she is sometimes associated with the Marxists. However, in an interview, she states: "I have not read Marx or any other political theory. I have read 'Man' and 'Hunger'. I have seen hunger and no theory is greater than that." Mahasweta Devi's knowledge of the caste and class intersections of our society is that of an insider's and she is thoroughly acquainted with the unchecked abuse of power rampant in the system. She is unsparing in her criticism of an exploitative society. Among the manipulative agencies she not only includes the feudal lords, encouraging the servility of the bonded labour, but also the religious practices which are discriminatory by nature. Together these forces buy for the blood of the lower castes and class. She asserts:

My experience makes me ruthlessly unforgiving towards

the exploiters or the exploiting system . . . I believe in anger, in justified violence and so peel the mask off the face of India which is projected by the Government to expose its naked brutality, savagery and caste and class exploitation and place this India , a hydra-headed monster before a people's court, the people being the millions.

Mahasweta Devi's activist writing not only transcends all political theories, it is solely people oriented. Her commitment to the cause of the downtrodden is absolute. She has waged a tireless crusade against the evils of bonded labour, untouchability, superstition, and exploitation on the basis of caste, class and gender. For the tribal population of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh, she is a mother figure whom they look up to for total support. A few years ago she was honoured by the tribals of West Bengal with the gift of 'Ma Sari' (A sari given to the mother of the bride during a tribal wedding), signifying their unconditional support to her. Many of her works deal with the issues close to the hearts of tribal people like Santhals, Lodhas' Shabars and Mundas.

Mahasweta Devi spends a great deal of her time living with the people she writes about. Her contribution towards the rehabilitation of these unfortunate victims of official apathy is remarkable. Since 1871, these tribes have been discriminated against, first by the British, who classified them as criminals, and later by the powers that be in independent India. She has made sincere efforts to put to an end their interminable suffering.

Mahasweta Devi believes that history is created by ordinary people who find their way in various art forms such as ballads, folklore and legends. Folk imagination, taking its cues from history, supplies innumerable tales of suffering and heroism. She draws inspiration from the stories of people who refuse to give up in the face of adversity.

22.4 Introduction to the Text: *Mother of 1084*

Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is one of the most popular texts she has written. The novella first appeared in the special autumn festival issue of the periodical *Prasad* in 1973. In the same year Mahasweta Devi adapted it for stage at the behest of Asit Das, who wanted to stage it.

22.4.1 Explanation

Set against the Naxalite movement of the 1960s, the story sensitively captures the agony of a mother, who remains bonded to her son even after the rest of the family severs all ties with him. The novel deals with the response of the common people to the movement,

particularly mothers of those young men who found themselves being inevitably drawn to the movement. Ironically the movement was not properly comprehended by those who were in position of power and the educated elite. The young men and women were censured as imprudent and misguided by the majority.

The novella revolves around Sujata, an upper middle class woman, whose youngest son Brati has recently been killed by the police. His identity now has been reduced to the numeral assigned to his corpse, that is, corpse number one thousand eighty four. No one in the family understands Sujata's agony. Her husband Divyanath is a corrupt accountant. Her three children have taken after their father and grandmother, being callous, insensitive and materialistic like them.

Using flashback technique, the author takes us twenty two years back in time, when Sujata, the protagonist was a pregnant mother, preparing to bring Brati, her fourth child into this world. Sujata had mustered enough courage to go to the nursing home all by herself. The doctor was surprised to see her alone, but Sujata knew it all along that Divyanath would never accompany her. She wondered why the doctor hoped to see him. Brati was born on the seventeenth of January. Today is also the seventeenth of January and exactly two years ago on the same day, the telephone bell had rung in the early hours of morning. A voice had asked Sujata, how she was related to Brati Chatterjee. That cold mechanical voice had also asked Sujata to come to Kantapukur. Her body lifeless, Sujata had fallen on the floor. For three months she was not able to register anything until she realized that the telephone had been removed from her room. Sujata wondered why? She was sure these people would never make the 'mistake' Brati made. They are wise people after all. There will not be another phone call from the police station. She will never go to Kantapukur again to be asked this question, "Do you identify your son?" Sujata's husband died for her the day he did not allow her to take the family car to Kantapukur. What if someone recognizes his car? All that he cared for was that the newspapers should not carry Brati's name and he succeeded in managing that.

Sujata's youngest child was kept out-of-the-way of the influence of his father and grandmother. The bond of love that existed between Sujata and Brati was the most precious gift, life had to offer Sujata. Brati remained completely alienated from his father. He never could bond with his siblings as well, who were materialistic and worldly-wise. On growing up Brati realizes that his father is a man of loose morals. Sujata, in spite of being beautiful and Loreto educated, was somehow forced into this marriage by her parents. It has been a loveless marriage. There has been no let up for Sujata from the mental torture, she has been subjected to by her womanizer husband and her mother-in law, who has always blamed Sujata for her son's moral perversion. Brati often confronted Sujata as to how she had tolerated this man for so long, to which she never responded. Ironically for Sujata and Brati the moment of liberation from this oppressive household never came.

Brati was gradually drawn to the Naxalite movement without his parents' knowledge.

He evaded even Sujata's queries with a disarming smile till the day of his death. A phone call announcing Brati's connection with the Naxals and his subsequent death in a police shoot out, changed Sujata's life forever.

Brati's death signified for the rest of the family wiping out of a blemish from the family name. He had links with the outlaws, the Naxalites and hence posed great threat to the prestige of the family. For Sujata, however, it meant eternal pain and loss. She is haunted by so many unanswered questions. Her son was a bright student with a national scholarship. Why did he have to die? Why was he alienated from the family and society to such an extent? It dawns upon Sujata that her son was among those estranged youth of society, who pay a heavy price for their isolation from the system. These young men and women are not understood by the elitist society that pushes the non-conformists to the periphery. The callous indifference of the family, society and the state drives these young people to the edge, discontent and rebellion seething within them.

When Sujata goes to meet the families of Somu and Lalu, the two poor friends of Brati, who were brutally killed with him, she is in for another shock. The betrayal by a new member of the group had resulted in the brutal deaths of Brati and his friends. Sujata learns that these poor folk know what she does not know—that attempts had been made to foil the Naxalite movement by the powers that be, that these young men were living dangerously with doom lurking round the corner for them, that the underprivileged sections of society unlike the upper strata had persuaded their children against the movement, because they could sense the terrible outcome. Sujata is moved when she meets Nandini, her son's girlfriend, who narrates her traumatic experience during her detention, when was tortured with one thousand watts bulb radiating overhead and her face scorched with cigarette butts. Angry and hurt, Nandini is nearly blind now. She has been benumbed by the cruelty of the Establishment, the family and society towards the youth, who wanted to rid the world around them from corruption, vice and injustice. Their call was for radical change of an unjust, corrupt, sick and reactionary social order, which was comprehended by people in the least. Sujata says goodbye to Nandini after giving her a photograph of Brati. Both of them know that probably they were parting never to meet again.

The novel has an extremely poignant ending. The title of the last section is "Night". The agony of a mother who has lost the only one of her children, who connected with her, understood her pain, and was sensitive to her predicament as a woman who could bond neither with her immoral husband nor with the rest of her children except Brati. Sujata's family is so insensitive that that they have fixed the engagement of their daughter Tuli, on Brati's birthday and the day when the news of his death reached Sujata. The dark winter night is flooded with strong lights in the drawing room of Sujata's home. There are roses which look bloodshot almost. Nandini and Brati were tricked even by these roses and these lights. Every thing in the house reminds her of Brati and yet Brati cannot be traced in anything that belongs to this house.

For the first time ever, Sujata has decided to convey her disgust for her husband in no

uncertain terms. She has made up her mind not to stay in this household any longer. She will not stay in any place, where Brati does not stay. She wishes she had enough courage to talk like this to Divyanath, her husband, while Brati was alive—she should have left the house with Brati—probably, she would have moved closer to Brati’s heart then—he would have known that this is the truth—but he left without knowing the truth.

Sujata somehow manages to go up the staircase. But there is lot of pain. And there was lot of pain before Brati came into this world. Why does Sujata remember only that time when Brati was born? Why not the time of other children’s birth. Is it because Brati will stay alive in her heart as an everlasting pain?

Sujata is in a dilemma. Did she bear all the pain quietly, because Brati had promised her that he would keep her in a magic glass house when he grows up for her to see the world from there while she would be invisible to others? Had he known this, would he have changed his ways? No! He wouldn’t have. She knows this and that is the reason why Brati was her dearest child. Brati is not in this house but he is many other places—in the red roses on the footpath, in the light on the pathways, in the laughter of the people, in Somu’s mother’s face, in the dark circles under Nandini’s eyes—where all will Sujata look for him? Her body is failing her—he is scattered in so many spaces—where all will Sujata look for him?

Sujata goes inside to take bath. The water is icy cold. She remembers—the slab of ice, the dead body smeared with blood, kept on the slab of ice. The ice stops the flow of blood. She remembers—cold water, cold like Brati’s fingers, cold like Brati’s forehead, cold like his hands—nothing can be done now. The whole day she has spent with Brati and now Brati’s body is in the crematorium. She can hear those voices—take the remains, to be put in the holy waters in Gaya.

Then again Sujata is forced to sit with the guests, who are extremely callous and insensitive to her agony and grief. Not realizing they are touching Sujata’s sore spot, they start talking about Brati. She is introduced to a journalist by her son-in-law, who even wants to interview her for a Bombay magazine, and asks her how Sujata reacted to her son’s killing and what would she like to say from the angle of a sorrowing mother. Sujata asks to be excused.

The story underscores the viciousness of a decadent, unfeeling society. These pseudo civilized people reek of certain rottenness. Their whole beings have been struck with decay and disease since their embryonic state. People like Brati wanted to annihilate this society, which nurtures the corrupt and the morally debased. It is the dead of society, who have the right to live on and not the living. The last section of the novel also brings to the fore the hypocrisy and utter lack of sensitivity on the part of Divyanath, Sujata’s husband, who has invited to the party even the police officer, who refused to hand over Brati’s body to Sujata. Sujata’s once again relives the pain of those moments, when Sarojpal, the police officer began sermonizing her, as Brati’s body lay in the morgue.

Sujata cries out in pain once again. Where can Brati run? The killers are everywhere—

in the cities, in the factories, in the tea gardens. Where can Brati run? Let him come to Sujata's arms. Sujata's lament is not shallow in any way. It has shaken every particle—the forgotten and the unforgotten history, the past, the present, the future—everything has been shaken. Sujata's howl of pain is not superficial. It has the stench of blood, the pledge of resistance, and the turmoil of grief. The novella ends with Sujata collapsing. Her husband thinks her appendicitis has burst. Maybe she is dying, never to return to the house, which has wiped out all signs of Brati's memories.

Mother of 1084 is among the most popular works of Mahasweta Devi. It has inspired not only the creative writers but also people from the world of cinema. Govind Nihalani has adapted the novella into a movie with Jaya Bachchan in the lead role.

It is a social document of rare power and intensity. The text bears an authentic testimony to the shattering of the post-independence illusions, the strongest expression of which was the Naxalite movement of the nineteen seventies. A story of protest and rebellion, the *Mother of 1084* not only succeeds in evoking emotions, but also anger and frustration that marked the disillusionment of the youth of society. One of its outstanding features is that it is a powerful and unqualified indictment of neo-colonialism that has always threatened to eat into the vitals of the postcolonial societies. The novella, therefore, can be seen as a powerful indictment of the Establishment. An epoch-making work, it will continue to inspire the generations to come not just in India but the world over.

22.5 Let Us Sum Up

The unit has introduced you a contemporary vociferous champion of the oppressed and the poor. Her famous novella *Mother of 1084* is a powerful testimony to that.

22.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss Mahasweta Devi as an activist writer.
2. Discuss the role of Sujata, the protagonist in the novel *Mother of 1084*.
3. '*Mother of 1084* bears out that gender and class cannot be viewed as polarities.' Discuss.

22.7 Bibliography

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UNIT-23

MAHA SHWETA DEVI : *MOTHER OF 1084* (II)

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Major Themes
 - 23.2.1 Many faces of Violence
 - 23.2.2 A Scathing Attack on the Bourgeoisie
- 23.3 Women Characters
- 23.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.5 Review Questions
- 23.6 Bibliography

23.0 Objectives

In continuation with the previous unit, we shall discuss further the major themes like violence and attack on the bourgeoisie in the novel *Mother of 1084*. We shall also study the novelist's art of characterisation with reference to women characters in the novel.

23.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, Mahasweta Devi's involvement with the Naxalite movement was absolute. Whatever she has written is an outcome of her commitment to some cause. She herself acknowledges that becoming a professional writer meant documenting her own time and history. As she herself puts it, "The Naxalite movement between the late sixties and early seventies, with its urban phase climaxing in 1970-71, was the first major event after I had become a writer that I felt an urge and an obligation to document."

As pointed out earlier, Brati is dearer to Sujata than any other of her children. She had shielded him from the influence of her husband and mother-in-law, whose crass materialistic values have been inherited by other children of hers. She had hoped that one day he will take her out of these repressive surroundings and she will be able to breathe freely. Sujata does not have any political leanings but after Brati's death, she awakens to the ideals that were dear to him. It is a moving narrative "of an apolitical mother's quest to know her martyred son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. Death brings him closer to her through her quest."

The novella seeks to trace the roots of the radical commitment the urban educated youth displayed during the troubled decades of the sixties and the seventies. The text is an unconditional censure of a callous, indifferent, debased and corrupt powers that be within the institution of family and society as a whole.

Brati represents those young men who were committed to the cause of the marginalized of society and renounced their family and the trappings of a comfortable lifestyle for the sake of that commitment. As observed already, their education was used by these men as a means of awakening to work for the eradication of corrupt and unlawful means, which were used to subjugate those living at the periphery of society. Ignited by zeal to purge society of inequities of an unjust and exploitative social order, they became outcasts in the family, where bourgeois principles were upheld and are treated as outsiders in an essentially repressive social order. Living on the edge, they were ready to pay the price for being different by sacrificing their lives. So selfless was their dedication that they asked for “neither power nor vote. They possessed indomitable spirit for the cause. They knew that they would be killed by the police or anti-party squad, the moment they are traced but they were not afraid to die.”

The story focuses on the cold-bloodedness and heartlessness with which these revolutionary young men and women were treated by their families and the government machinery. Brati is a non-conformist but a man of integrity and sensitivity. A materialistic, corrupt, unethical and insensitive father and equally unfeeling siblings simply write him off. He is never accepted by them as one of their own while he is alive. After his brutal killing, he is discredited further. Not only does the father, Divyanath refuse permission to Sujata to take the family car to the mortuary at Kantapukur, where she is wanted to identify the body, he also does his best to hush up the matter and succeeds because of the nexus between the reactionary forces and the Establishment. Another instance of their heartlessness comes to light when the date of the engagement ceremony of Tuli, Brati’s sister is fixed for the seventeenth of January, Brati’s birthday and also the day the news of his death had reached Sujata. The unfeeling and callous family rejoices while Sujata mourns and remembers Brati throughout the party. They add to her agony by referring to Brati as a ‘misguided’ young man, who brought bad name to a ‘respectable’ family. A journalist guest even wants an interview with Sujata, seeking her response ‘as a sorrowing mother.’

The Establishment stifles any signs of protest and rebellion that pose any threat to a corrupt and brutal social order. While the country had gained freedom from the colonizers, a new order of authoritative and repressive neo-colonizers had taken their place. Their brutality and force was certainly more hurtful because they were the natives of the country. *Mother of 1084* focuses on the terror unleashed by these authoritarian and tyrannical forces. Nandini provides a harrowing account of the way the perpetrators of such cruelty are dangerously active even now. Alluring the victims with all kinds of temptations, pricking them in the nails with needles, blinding them with bulbs of one thousand watts, inflicting unbearable pain in their private parts, these agents of hell unleash horror of the most heinous kind for those who dare

to defy them. People like Brati, however, refuse to give in even in the face of suffering. From being in jail to being in police custody—eventually their files are closed. And then there is a full stop. Nandini was tortured in police custody too. As pointed out in the previous chapter, her eyes were damaged on being subjected to the glare of the bulbs of one thousand watts; her cheeks were burnt with cigarette stubs. Life is full of pain and desolation for Nandini. The story also highlights the agonizing predicament of Somu’s mother, who is inconsolable and cries her heart out before Sujata. At least she can do that. It dawns upon Sujata that she never even had the freedom to cry the way Somu’s mother does because she is alienated from people she lives with. Sujata is stirred by the wretched state of these poor people, who cannot even afford the basic necessities of life. Coming back home, Sujata is disgusted to see the show of opulence and vulgarity. So many hungry mouths could have been fed with the money spent on the expensive *saris* of her daughters and daughter-in-law.

Mother of 1084 captures the turmoil of the Naxalite movement and foregrounds issues that the Establishment believed in concealing so as to cover up inhumanity of the public as well as the private spheres of life.

23.2 Major Themes

23.2.1 Many Faces of Violence

Mahasweta Devi was so moved by the plight of these young people and so impressed by their revolutionary fervour that she endorsed the violence of the Naxalites. “When the State and the Establishment shun the path of non-violence, then why should the oppressed sections be non-violent?” The play highlights the state-sponsored violence which, in fact leads to counter violence on the part of the victimized. The way Nandini, Brati and Somu are tortured in police custody bears this out. The story foregrounds the reasons for the Naxalites taking recourse to violence. The police provided protection to goons masquerading as politicians, officers and even as artists, intellectuals and writers, but the ones who rejected such shallow society, death was “the sentence reserved for every one of them. . . .”

The harrowing account of the dead bodies of Somu, Lalu and Brati is extremely unsettling for the readers. This spectacle of cruelty and brutal force against resolute and educated young men and women is a sad comment on way police and the law-making machinery generally operated in our country during the troubled decades of the seventies.

The novella owes its force to such authentic and heart-rending description of the corpses of Brati’s poor friends: “Somu had twenty three wounds on his body. Bijit sixteen. Lalu’s entrails had had been pulled out and wrapped around his body’ (50). The account of Brati’s body is equally agonizing and haunting:

There were three bullet holes on his body, one on the chest, one on the stomach and one on the throat. . . . The bullets had been aimed from close range. The skin around the holes

was blue. . . . Three bullet holes: on the neck, on the abdomen, on the chest . . . Brati's face, battered and smashed by the blunt edge of a sharp, heavy weapon . . . there was not an inch of skin left smooth and clear. . . . It was all raw flesh, all battered and smashed. (11)

The violence sponsored by the state was acceptable to those who were supposed to be the guardians of law. The rebellion of these young men and women had to be suppressed at any cost. Anybody, just about anybody was allowed to kill these spirited people because their ways were not good enough to satisfy the whims of the tyrannical powers that be.

To kill them one did not need any special sanction from the law or the courts of justice. Individuals and gangs of killers had equal rights to kill these faithless young men. They could be killed with bullets, knives, hatchets, with any weapon whatsoever. They could be killed any time any place for any audience present. (19)

The novella, thus, focuses on violence of the Naxalites, which Mahasweta Devi endorses because she found the movement, particularly in its initial stages, a powerful tool in the hands of the marginalized sections of society to secure justice for themselves. This is the reason why she agreed to be their voice. Violence, in fact, was the only instrument in the hands of these people to ensure that their food was not taken away, their land was not snatched and their women and children were safe.

However, the far more terrible, essential violence of the state machinery dehumanizes its agents to the extent of making them mercenaries, ready to butcher people at the slightest pretext. The way they unleash their brutality defies all limits of cruelty. *Mother of 1084*, therefore, refers to multiple facets of violence during the troubled times of the nineteen seventies.

23.2.2 A Scathing Attack on the *Bourgeoisie*

Mother of 1084 is a scathing attack on the hypocritical veneer of a pseudo-civilized society. Mahasweta Devi found herself alienated from a social set up that promoted hypocrisy and triviality in the name of modernity. Her contempt for such pseudo values is absolute. It finds a powerful expression in *Mother of 1084*.

As the novella opens Sujata thinks of the day, Brati came into this world twenty two years ago. It was the seventeenth of January. Sujata then thinks of the day, Brati left this world two years ago. It was seventeenth of January again. Early in the morning, the telephone bell had rung. A cold clinical voice had asked who Brati Chatterjee was. Your son? Come at once to Kantapukur. Sujata had collapsed. It was indeed a time of crisis for the family, which should have brought them closer. But this family is different. Sujata was not even allowed to take the family car to Kantapukur. Had the car been spotted by someone known to the family, it would have spelt disaster for the respectable Chatterjee household!

One is acquainted with the fake notions of respectability the bourgeois cherish and perpetuate regardless of the pain they cause even to their close relations. The text records

Sujata's agony most poignantly. The behaviour of Divyanath had come as deep shock to Sujata's whole consciousness. She was struck by a blow most unkind. Traumatized, battered and bruised, she felt as though a sea separated them both. Morally debased and utterly insensitive, Divyanath never realized that he cared less for dead Brati and more for his honour and security. That very day and that very moment, for Sujata Divyanath became a man without identity. His efforts to dissociate Brati from the other boys succeeded and the next day the names of the boys, who had been killed, appeared in the papers minus of course, Brati's name. That is how Brati's father had erased Brati from his mind and from history. Sujata, however, has not been able to do it. Brati is still around — as a presence etched in her mind.

The story highlights the difference of attitudes within the same family. Divyanath wants to wipe off every trace of Brati's memory. Sujata finds his photograph and shoes missing from the veranda. A while ago Binny had cried bitterly. It appeared then that she loved Brati, but not now. That was plain hypocrisy. Similarly, Brati just could not put up with his father. He had told Sujata once that Divyanath was not his enemy as a person but he could not accept the values he believed in. He had also told his mother that a section of society, which treasured such value system, was actually our enemy and Divyanath belonged to that section.

The insensitivity, hypocrisy and falsehood of Sujata's family come to the fore on many occasions. Sujata is aghast at the heartlessness of the members of her family, including Brati's father and his siblings, who have fixed the engagement ceremony of Tuli, Brati's sister on the seventeenth of January. No one seems to remember except Sujata and of course the housemaid, Hem, who had brought up Brati since childhood, that this not only happens to be Brati's birthday but also the day, they got the news of his death. Divyanath claims he was very close to his son, who broke his heart. He holds Sujata responsible for his death. Sujata remembers Divyanath used to call Brati "unfeeling son."

The guests are equally phony and thoughtless in their conduct. Unable to understand Sujata's anguish, they make trivial and unsympathetic comments and ask silly and insensitive questions. Sujata listens to the petty talk of these people, who sip scotch and talk about a *swami*, the halo behind him burning like a bulb, the light growing bright and bright like thousand suns. Sujata remembers the young boy Kush, whose eyes faced bulbs of thousand watts in custody, whose nails had been pulled out, whose body was pricked with needles—forty eight hours, seventy two hours and he was told—you are free! He was shot in front of his home—his eyeballs were completely burnt. Sujata wonders how Mrs. Kapadia not only did not lose her eyesight having faced a thousand suns, but found her inner sight instead! Mrs. Kapadia further tells that the *swami*, who was flying his own plane, asked her to meet him at Miami and told her that she was the girl in the book she was carrying—black girl in search of God—she was black, her soul was black. After that she found her god and all was light. Sujata's is benumbed as she listens to the foolish talk of these people. Sujata's torment does not end here. A journalist at the party wants Sujata's interview because her son was killed and from the angle of a sorrowing mother what would be her reaction. Sujata feels suffocated in this unreal

world of small-minded and shallow people. It was a decadent world:

They were contaminated and diseased from the very womb. The society that Brati and his comrades had tried to exterminate kept thousands starving in order to nourish and support these vermin. It was a society that gave the dead the right to live, and denied it to the living. (116)

Mother of 1084 is a powerful comment on society that reeks of corruption, malevolence and pretense. The novella invites us to re-examine our attitudes towards the social mores and values, we seldom ever question and the injustice we take lying down. It articulates a strong note of protest against the bourgeois values and a decadent culture, which seem to eat into the vitals of society.

23.3 Women Characters in *Mother of 1084*

Mother of 1084 besides being the story of a young revolutionary, who is brutally killed by the Establishment, is also significant as the harrowing tale of a mother, who loses her son and thereafter makes sincere efforts to understand the principles he upheld and died for. As she embarks on this quest, she experiences not just pain but also enlightenment.

Sujata and Brati nurtured and shared a deep aversion for the pseudo bourgeois values, but Sujata found herself unable to articulate her disgust. Brati on the other hand, was always an epitome of moral courage. He kept on inspiring Sujata to have the nerve to put her foot down. Ironically Sujata is able to understand the full import of all these things only after Brati's death. On meeting Nandini, Sujata is overwhelmed as she comprehends the meaning of sacrifice made by Brati. The novella is also, therefore, a powerful statement on the awakening of an 'apolitical mother'. Sujata is now an

. . . enlightened mother who had read in her son's special concern for her, his understanding of her daily humiliation as a woman and her quiet, determined struggle for self assertion which ironically gathers force and momentum after Brati's death.⁷

When Sujata visits Somu's Mother, she is introduced to that side of Brati's disposition, she was not familiar with. Scarcely could she believe that Brati frequented this ramshackle hut and would ask for water, ask for tea from Somu's mother. When Somu's mother questioned why was he putting his life in danger. He would say nothing, he would just smile. His smile still haunts Somu's mother. Sujata had always thought Brati's memories belonged only to her—the reminiscence of his innocent smile was only hers. But Brati has left a heap of memories for Somu's mother to cherish too. Probably Somu's mother knew Brati better. Meeting Somu's mother, Sujata finds a peace, she found nowhere else. She realizes Brati's commitment for the have-nots of society. She had seen the class barriers dissolve as both women shared a similar pain. However, with the passage of time, possibly those barriers have surfaced again. Sujata asks herself whether she knew Brati as well as Somu's mother knew him. When this poor woman asks Sujata why she did not stop Brati from treading the dangerous path, Sujata is

speechless. Now she knows that she stands vanquished in front of Somu's mother—not just Somu's mother but thousands of mothers, because she did not know what her son was doing.

Somu's mother not only jolts Sujata into an awareness of how oblivious she was of Brati's truth, she also shocks her when she narrates how Somu's father, the poor innocent man had desperately pleaded with the police officer to come to the colony and take the boys to the hospital. Eventually, when the van did reach the colony, panting and screaming, he called out for boys, frantically flashing the torchlight only to find lifeless bodies strewn around. Sujata recalls Divyanath's reaction at Brati's death—what a sharp contrast to the reaction of Somu's father. He was frantic too, but only to hush up the news of his son's death. Somu's father had never ever thought of saving his skin—possibly he never imagined this could also be thought. Those who think on these lines could not have been familiar with him. Somu's father and Divyanath are two beings of this world, who belong to absolutely different territories. Somu's mother has shaken Sujata, who will now be treading the unfamiliar path of rebellion against the dead and worn out values and social mores.

Meeting Nandini brings Sujata to yet another platform of awareness. When Nandini tells Sujata, Anindya had betrayed them; Sujata is unable to comprehend this; knowing the consequences how he must have done that? When she tells Nandini she is not aware of all this, Nandini snaps angrily, telling Sujata that people of her class seldom ever know anything; it is not important for them to know how and why things happen; she must be realizing now how wrong these beliefs were. Sujata had nothing to say to Nandini. Surrounded by emptiness, it dawns upon her that it will not ever be possible for her to share Nandini's beliefs, her faith. She had never tried to understand people like Brati and Nandini. By and by Sujata discovers her flaws and awakens as never before to a new realization.

Sujata's prolonged conversation with Nandini shocks Sujata out of her complacency. When she tells Nandini every thing is normal and peaceful now, Nandini shrieks, as though in pain. How can Sujata say that; when there are thousands, who are decaying in the jails? Nandini is still full of anger. May be she will wage another war. May be she will be captured again: "Some day you might hear . . . they have arrested me again" (58). Sujata realizes how little she knew her son and others who staked everything they had. To quote Samik Bandhopadhyay:

Nandini is the one who 'knows' and has 'decided' , While Sujata is in the throes of learning/knowing and edging towards deciding. . . It is Nandini who explains and clarifies the issues of rebellion, power, betrayal, and also revolutionary optimism.⁸

Full of utter despondency, she is repulsed by the decay that had set in and threatened to eat away the very fabric of society. The awareness that everything was decaying and that everyone —Divyanath, Dhiman, Amit, Mr. Kapadia—Tuli, Tony, Jesu Mitra, Molly Mitra , Mrs. Kapadia, and she herself?—all were rotten carcasses, full of menace, putting at risk every thing that is beautiful and pure on this earth. Sujata cries out in pain: "Did he die. . . to

leave the world to these corpses? Never”(127).

Sujata collapses but not without protest. The two women whom Brati connected with bring her to a juncture, where she can be her true self. Her trauma of not having really understood her son, in spite of her bonding with him, is alleviated to an extent. She tries to do every thing she can to make amends, to find peace by severing connection with the system and people, Brati detested. Somu’s mother and Nandini have not only acquainted her with her son, she did not know but also help her discover her being. E. Satyanarayana observes:

... Sujata shakes herself off the shackles of the patriarchal values enjoined on women. Enlightened she takes up cudgels against the society itself. Symbolically Sujata moves from the world of innocence to the world of experience. As a result she discovers inside herself a wish which has been so far suppressed due to the lack of courage.⁹

Though *Mother of 1084* is not a feminist text in the true sense of the term, Mahasweta Devi very sensitively brings to the fore the feelings and responses of a woman. Sujata’s portrayal as a mother, her tenderness and absolute love for her nonconformist son, who taught her courage and familiarized her with the rottenness of a stratum of society, has been dealt with by Mahasweta Devi very powerfully and with a rare compassion. Similarly, the other two women, sensitive to Sujata’s plight have been portrayed with utmost sensitivity. One of the significant features of the text is that women characters like their male counterparts have been delineated in the context of views and values espoused by the upper and the lower strata of society. Sujata, her son and Nandini are completely alienated from the class they actually belong to. They identify more with the deprived sections of society and stand in sharp contrast to decadent bourgeoisie represented by Sujata’s daughters, daughter-in-law and the other women in the party.

23.4 Let Us Sum Up

In the last units you were able to understand:

- Mahashweta Devi’s tireless crusade against injustice through her writings,
- many faces of violence, and
- hypocritical veneer of a pseudo-civilized society.

23.5 Review Questions

1. Discuss Mahashweta Devi’s art of characterisation with reference to the women characters in the novel *Mother of 1084*.
2. How does the novel *Mother of 1084* expose the pseudo values of the bourgeoisie?

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